



勇者

呪術師は

になれない

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菱影代理
Illustration 誉

A thaumaturge
can't be a brave.

R
レッドライジング
ボックス

Jujutsushi Wa Yuusha Ni Narenai

Act 1-2

by Hishi Kage Dairi

[Novel Updates](#)

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Act 1 : Shiromine Gakuen Class 2–7

Shiramine Academy Class 2–7 Attendance Record

Shiramine Academy, Class 2–7. Attendance record. 41 students.

Boys. 22 students.

Seat No. 1: Azuma Shinichi — Boy’s class representative

Seat No. 2: Ito Seiji

Seat No. 3: Ueda Youhei — Archery club

Seat No. 4: Ooyama Daisuke — Karate club

Seat No. 5: Kousaka Hiroki — Soccer club

Seat No. 6: Saitou Masaru — Archery club

Seat No. 7: Sakurai Touya — Archery club

Seat No. 8: Satou Yuuya

Seat No. 9: Shimokawa Junnosuke

Seat No. 10: Sugino Takashi — Judo club

Seat No. 11: Souma Yuuto — Kendo club

Seat No. 12: Takashima Yuudai — Baseball club

Seat No. 13: Tendou Ryuichi

Seat No. 14: Nakai Shouta

Seat No. 15: Nakajima Haruma — Art club

Seat No. 16: Hayama Relight — Basketball club^[2]

Seat No. 17: Higuchi Kyouya

Seat No. 18: Hirano Kouhei — Soccer club

Seat No. 19: Momokawa Kotarou — Literature club

Seat No. 20: Yamakawa Junichirou — Drama club

Seat No. 21: Yamada Genki — Baseball club

Seat No. 22: Yokomichi Hajime

Girls. 19 students.

Seat No. 31: Reina Adelhide Ayase

Seat No. 32: Iijima Mayumi

Seat No. 33: Kitaoji Rurika — Cooking club

Seat No. 34: Kizaki Akane — Volleyball club

Seat No. 35: Kisaragi Ryouko — Girl's class representative

Seat No. 36: Kenzaki Asuna — Kendo club

Seat No. 37: Satou Aya

Seat No. 38: Shinohara Emi — Illustration club^[1]

Seat No. 39: Souma Sakura — Archery club

Seat No. 40: Takanashi Kotori

Seat No. 41: Nagae Yukiko — Literature club

Seat No. 42: Natsukawa Minami — Track and field

Seat No. 43: Nishiyama Minori — Brass band

Seat No. 44: Nonomiya Julia — Tennis club

Seat No. 45: Hinagiku Saya — Archery club

Seat No. 46: Himeno Airi

Seat No. 47: Futaba Meiko — Cooking club

Seat No. 48: Yoshizaki Maria — Tennis club

Seat No. 49: Randou Kyouko

Prologue: Momokawa Kotaro

September 19th, Respect for the Aged Day. I, Momokawa Kotaro, 2nd year student of Shiromine Private Gakuen, am enjoying the so called national holiday. To be specific, I'm currently hunting for light novels, mangas, and games until I reach the center of the city.

Although I belong only in the literature club, for a typical student like me, who's getting by with just a monthly allowance from his parents, I can't afford to spend too much of my funds in just one trip. I'm somewhat an otaku-ish student, but I don't think I necessarily categorize as one. Currently I don't have problems with my economic condition, considering I was originally a cheapskate.

"Maybe it's time to go back"

As I'm leaving the large bookstore from where I bought a copy of this month's light novel, the sun was already inclined to the back of the mountain, coloring the cloudless, early autumn sky with a crimson color.

Maybe it was because I'm shopping alone, I had a little premonition of the vanity of life when I saw that sunset, as I was walking sloppily on the road without thinking anything.

"Hey, don't touch me!"

That, even if I can't say it as something like shrill, the nuance of the girl's voice was like a scream.

When I noticed, I was looking curiously at the alleyway from where that voice came from.

"Eh, no way "

In that place, there were four men encircling two girls, I was partly expecting it but, the spectacle was filled with surprise.

The two girls were wearing the recently outdated sailor uniform. That was

obvious since I am also going to Shiromine Gakuen. One of the girls with shoulder length hair is a cute girl, while the other one is just a plain glasses girl without any conspicuous point.

It seems the one who's screaming is the former. Though the glasses-san face is turning pale as she completely stepped back, it was clear when looking from where I was currently standing.

"Oioi, you shouldn't say those kinds of words to gentlemen like us, right?"

Saying that, the man corrected the two girls. Looking like gentlemen, no matter how he says it they're completely more like Yankees or hoodlums, despite their correction. What the heck is with that loose hip-hop parka, where the heck did he buy it?

But, no matter how stereotypical these juvenile delinquents are, I just couldn't do something stupid with the reality before me. They're also high school students like me, even more so, they're most likely from the infamous Kurokawa high and are nicknamed as "Students of Kuro high"*. [TL : Kurokawa means "Black River" while the nickname changed into "Black High School"]

"Nope, no matter what you say, that's impossible right? "

Even I need to think twice with my game filled-brain, whether I must go against opposing those four hardcore Yankees to save the girls whose face isn't even in my memory only because they're of the same school as mine.

How can I fight against those Yankees with nice builds with my meager 152 cm height and 45 kg* weight. Of course I don't have that sort of mastery of martial arts or something with me. My poor specs match my appearance.

"Damn it, I don't see anything, I really didn't see anything..... "

I mean, who the heck going to blame me from running away at once from this place.

I mean, see, I'm not the only one who notices this situation. Everyone is just hurriedly getting away from this place since some time ago even though they had a glance in this alleyway for a moment, they're just passing it like that as if it has nothing to do with them.

unable to do after all.)

I'm not at fault here, I mean I don't think these guys are at fault too. There are some things that humans are able and unable to do after all.

That's right, no matter how bad these delinquents are, they're not something like atrocious criminals who will rape or murder someone so calmly. After all, despite being students from the infamous "Black High", it's only at the point of where they're repeatedly receiving a "Grace" from the police when causing some brawl. I mean, though those two girls are a little frightened, they'll eventually be released by those thugs.

And then, when I'm about to leave this place as I turned away with my eyes shut tight, I felt a strong sense of self-loathing in myself.

"Oi, what have you been looking at? "

"HAH!? "

I unintentionally look back toward the voice that called me. The four thugs who's looking with trance expression at the two girls was simultaneously looking at my direction.

"No-Uhm, I just — — "

"Hah, WHAT, THIS GIRL IS SO INDIFFERENT HUH ?"

They keep saying whatever they want, easily interrupting my all-out excuse.

"He~, You're quite a cute one there, want to become our girl"

"You stupid, look, no matter how you look at it, SHE IS A HE"

"Hah, seriously? isn't she just wearing a boyish style?"

"EH? Hah? Damn it, are you kidding me, that'll make me[ore*] lose my self-confidence right"[TL* : Momokawa usually using Boku]

You guys might be joking right, no matter how you look at it, I[boku] am a man — — — or so I thought, it's painful since I can't retort them.

I[boku], who has an androgynous face, though it might sound nice right, it doesn't mean that I'm the so called handsome boy with rosy cheeks.

Though I've big eyes, it's more like scornful eyes of the evil stray cat. Even if

my eyebrows are somewhat thick, it's unbalanced with my baby face. I'm definitely not a bishoujo but, this level is around the level of a frail girl in the class right.

With these and a little bit of height, though there's a possibility that I can be judged as a man, I can't think of my small and slender build as only because nutritional deficiency. With my somehow round and shorth shoulder width, it made me lose my only chance for someone to make a distinction of my gender even just by my silhouette. It seems that my hair which is on the long side is also the reason for someone to mistake my gender. It's not like I have any intention to cut it though. Because I'll look more childish when I cut it short.

I mean my current attire is, a little loose white parka in a common jeans[jacket] and it's not the kind of fashion that will bring in manly charm.

Even so, in the first what I need to do in the current situation is not to make an appeal to explain my gender, I need to made an escape from this place ASAP.

Maybe they'll chase me out of curiosity if I escaped as it is. This place is somewhat quiet, that's if you don't accidentally end up in this place.

"A-Uhm! They're my friends and we're about to play with our classmate! "

I'm calling it, the strategy of "Some of my fellow are waiting on my back". It's a more reliable strategy than the sink or swim "Police officer-san, they're right here", right.

"Ah, then? My bad then, it's look like that plan going to be canceled"

It was shot down.

"Eh-No, that'll be troubling"

"I say it's okay, you're these two's companion right ? Come along with us, we'll give you a lot of love whether you're a boy or girl"

Chills ran through my spine towards the words of the long haired-dye in brown colored-man who first recognized me as girl. This guy, is he drunk!. [EN: What a descriptive sentence!]

Oh crap, I should run away with a dash without thinking about guilty feeling or something. Though it's a little unsightly, I'll run to that konbini* and

shouting "HELP ME!". At worst, they might be just call the police. [TL* : Minimart]

And then, with that plan in my mind, I'm do a 180° turn and break into a sprint without minding about the onlookers.

"Fugya! "

But, my first step to escape was meeting with whatever object in front of me, my body which received the damage was rolling miserably on the cold road. That's hurt.

"Are, you, are you Momokawa?"

Uwa, someone is grabbing my arm when I'm knocked down, a refreshing tenor voice can be heard from above me who's half crying. When I raised my face reflexively, there's two faces that I recognized at that place.

"Ah, Souma-kun, Tendou-kun"

"Are you alright? It seems you fell in a rather flashy way"

"Leave it, it'll look pitiful to let it go as it is"

My expression turned sour but, the ikemen were unexpectedly standing in that place.

The one who's worrying about me is Souma Yuuto.

Putting on a sweet mask of an embarrassed idol wherever he goes with his tall and slender figure is the subject of admiration, even for men. If I was a girl, I would've certainly fell for him.

And pointing to that matter, despite being a little sharp, is a big guy with a different charm than Souma-kun.

His name is Tendou Ryuichi.

With a height surpassing 190 cm, and massive frame with well-toned muscles. That peculiar, face isn't the gorilla type, and paired with his blonde colored-dyed hair, he's a wild ikemen with a sharp look.

Despite the difference in style, they're wearing same gakuran which can be differentiated with the girls' uniform of Shiromine gakuen wore by the two girls

over that alleyway . Even so, since they're famous within the school, there's no one who didn't know of their face.

What's more, since they're my classmates who personally know me, they won't mistake me even if I'm wearing everyday clothes.

"Ah-Uhm, since I'm actually okay, please save those two over there"

I stand quickly and showing the alleyway where the sum total of 6 person were gathered in. It might be obvious what kind of the situation right now.

"CHE, the guys from Black high huh"

"It seems"

See, they instantly understood the situation.

Souma-kun is the holder of many heroic tales in which he saved many students of Shiromine in trouble with thugs without differentiating between gender, while Tendou-kun is the holder of legendary feats in which he's fought 10 thugs alone. Oh God if it's the two of them who have cheat statuses lending their hand, whether it's 2, 3, or 4 thugs, they'll somehow accomplish it.

"Well then, I will –"

"Geez, meeting such trouble again. Yuuto, let's do this like the usual"

"As you wish, Ryuichi. Our fellow students will be in trouble if we didn't help them ASAP"

Apparently, they already forgetting about my existence. Luckily, thanks to the gallant entry of these two striking ikemen combi, the 4 thugs also forgot about me.

Or not, only that long haired-fake blondie is the one who's looking with regretful expression at me who made an escape. Uwaa, so disgusting

At any rate, just like that I escaped from that predicament.

Ha~h, I'm so miserable no matter where I go, just how small of an existence am I compared to those two. I unintentionally self-loath my own powerlessness. But, not feeling disgusted or regret is also a common misunderstanding.

I'm different from them. Be it my face, brain, strength, or wisdom.

Undoubtedly, including luck.

But, I'm not feeling pessimistic about that. The great majority in this world is are not the kind of people who excell in just about anything and everything like them. They're just too special.

Since I'm looking at them from near, it's not natural that I get used to their radiance.

I'm me, it's been like that so far, even from now on, I'll spend my life corresponding to my own abilities. Amongst the people who live this way, something like saving the beautiful girl in pinch is an impossible event.

Regarding today's incident, right, I managed not to get punched and safely escaped from that place. In addition, with the two heroes entering the scene to save the day, the girls are is saved, the thugs are punished, it's a perfect ending.

And me, just a mob character who's just happened to be on in that place, the Student A. I'm not dissatisfied with that role or anything. Because I'm not suited to save those girls.

Just like them who like brave heroes, that role isn't suited for me.

Chapter 1: Class 2–7

September 20th, weekday. The huge building of Shiramine Private Academy is swallowing up listless students returning to school after a 3-day break.^[2]

It is a time when the morning chime is just about another 10 minutes away. More than half of the students of class 2–7, of which I am a member, are already seated, or standing chatting with classmates, enjoying the morning.

“Buhahahaha! My sides! So, what’d you do then, Kotaro?”

The male student raising this boisterously vulgar laughter is the big-bodied, round-faced Saitou Masaru, a buddy of mine all the way from middle school.

“The hell do you expect? I left it to the other two and went home.”

I am scrunching my slightly thick-ish eyebrows and recounting the events from yesterday.

“You what? Such a waste. You got that delicious an event right in front of you, and could’ve raised a flag with just a bit more!”^[3]

“With Souma-kun and Tendou-kun there, do you seriously expect me to take the stage? In the first place, there’s literally no way I can think about events and shit when there’s a group of real live punks right in front of me.”

I express my truly humble opinion while glaring at my slightly excited friend.

“No well, wasn’t there just 4 of ‘em? I could’ve even easily done something with only those numbers? Truly, such a shame. Should’ve gone with you yesterday.”

He really seems to like those damsel-in-distress situations, Masaru’s been going on and on about it for a while now. He’s in top condition as always.

Looking at my friend engaged in his delusions with warm eyes, with his height and build like a sumo-wrestler, in a real brawl-out, he’d most likely put up a much better fight than me, I thought.

The short wooden sword, which he insists is solely for self-defence, hidden

away in his backpack might finally make its debut. Though I don't think those special techniques inherited from battle manga he claims to have mastered will be at all useful.

"As for me, I'm just glad I didn't get beaten to a pulp. And also, those two seems to have smoothly finished the rescue."

I direct my vision towards the teacher's platform where a mishmash of boys and girls have gathered. Their proper appearance and refreshing chatter resembled a cliché scene from high school dramas.

Souma Yuuto, also among those members, his outstanding face and charm made him seem to be literally shining. He could easily be dubbed the protagonist, or at least, there was no doubt, he was the central figure of the group.

"Damn Souma, saving not only one, but two girls. Looks like you're the hero even on holidays."

"You're overexerting. I just happen to pass by, and Ryuichi was there too, so it somehow just happened."

"But Souma-kun, you could've handled them even by yourself right?"

"Hmm, well, I guess I could've won even without the training swordbokutou if it was only that much."

Pointing an ear for a bit, and I hear this kind of dialogue.

Souma-kun's "could've won" has tremendous persuasiveness when he's actually got a track record of saving girls.

By the way, that training sword he mentioned, unlike a certain somebody insisting on carrying one for self-defence, he carries it for the actually legitimate reason of Kendo club use. The bamboo sword bag he always shoulders along with his schoolbag seems to contain a wooden sword used for practice swings.

It's obvious that having a weapon ala wooden sword is better than being bare handed, but combined with his Nationals level skill, Souma-kun can certainly kick ass. To boot, with him and his childhood pal, Tendou Ryuichi, often getting involved in fights, he's got the first hand experience too.

“Gununu...W-well, Souma’s on the strong side I guess, a measly 4 delinquents are obviously child’s play. Even I know I’m not at his level yet.”

“Give it up Masaru, you’re not even close to rivaling Souma-kun.”

To the Masaru, gallantly nodding to himself while arms crossed as if saying something profound, it’s a true friend’s job to burst his bubble with a good retort.

“Though, I can’t say I don’t know the feeling.”

Going back to eavesdropping onto the Souma group, now a truly envious situation is in the midst of unfolding.

“I take my eyes off him for one second, and nii-sanbrother does it again. Please try to restrain yourself a little.”

“Ahaha, you worry too much Sakura. I’m completely fine see?”

The female student calling to him as big brother was, along with himself, one of the top celebrities of Shiramine Academy. Not because of her relation to him as his twin sharing the same Souma surname, but because this Souma Sakura possesses just as much as charm as her brother.

Long glossy black hair, complexion white as snow. The sailor uniform accentuating her slender but curvy, sexy body line, and smooth long legs extending from the dark-blue pleated skirt.

A small head, thin contours, a face as if crafted passionately by the hands of God. Especially the big yet sharp eyes are perfect beyond words. Those jet-black eyes possess an almost deadly charm.

Her superior appearance was not all. With a sharp mind, and excellent athletic ability, she truly possessed the best of both worlds. A member of the Archery club, like her brother, she was a regular at the National level.

Leaving aside appearance and ability, her courteous behaviour with colleagues, and respectful mannerisms with superiors – she displayed picturesque upstanding morals.

She would more appropriately be called the school Idol. No man would not desire such an idealised Yamato-Nadeshiko-esque girl.^[4]

However, there existed no frivolous rumours of her since enrollment, as she's always stuck to her brother like glue.

“And there you go again nii-san, you always –”

My eyes now reflected her drawing closer to her brother which would certainly not be an appropriate, far too close, distance of interaction between boys and girls of our age. Even I could see the objectionability of their closeness in both the physical and mental sense. Personal Space, I wonder if that's a thing.

I look away from the charming brother-sister duo who don't look anything other than a lovey-dovey couple, but the conversation nonetheless flows right back into my ears.

“– At least think of how I feel constantly having to worry.”

“Yeah my bad, I'll take better care from next time.”

And on this side, Masaru's usual foul expression seems to have worsened, his teeth-grinding, auditory display of jealousy in full view.

Nope, He's hopeless. Falling for that Souma Sakura is simply bad math. To my friend whose loss has been decided even before the game, I have no words.

For Masaru, it was love at first sight from the day of enrollment. But personally, I just couldn't laugh at this development. For the people in the same predicament as him are too numerous. In consequent, the male students chasing after her, caused the phenomenon of a great influx of membership into the Archery club this year and last, him also becoming one such member. I simply couldn't laugh at him, this Saito Masaru.

Well, he's just a ghost member now though.

Just quitting would be simple, but that not having happened perhaps demonstrates the complexity of the human heart.

While thinking these philosophical and useless things, I follow Masaru's line of sight to find the appearance of the little sister, Sakura, looking down with a flushed face while having her brother caress her head and saying “Sorry, my bad”.

Nah, I should just tell him its better to give up.

While the handsome brother-sister couple are off in their own cherry-colored world, I get myself ready to dish out a harsh reality.

The woman known as Souma Sakura is dangerous. She would certainly drive to madness, many hordes of men. I don't care what the fellows of the Souma Sakura underground fan club does, but I won't regret saving this friend of mine from falling to the Dark Side.

“Ah!! Sakura-chan no fair, Yuu-kun, pat my head too –”

And there appears the ternary force, barging right into the middle of the isolated world of brother and sister.

A small, even compared to my own 150cm4ft 11 height, and who would be seen as nothing but a middle schooler, or maybe even a grade schooler if you're not careful, girl raised a high pitched voice and forcibly tackled into Souma Yuuto.

Well, though I expected some violent intervention as this point in time, even I can't help up cast a cold look at the scene before me.

“Eh, well I guess I'll have to, for you Reina.”

“Ehehe – do it s'more,”

“Nii-san, please don't spoil her so much.”

Completely ignoring Sakura's nagging, the girl who was enjoying a helping of Souma Yuuto head-patting as if she was a pet dog was Reina Adelhide Ayase, the 2nd childhood friend.

She's maybe half or perhaps a quarter, well anyway, as can be guessed from the surname, she's an inheritor of western blood, and, dissimilar to Souma Sakura, gives off yet a different kind of beauty resembling a French doll.

Her hair, a natural blonde hue fashioned into twintails, and her eyes the color of a beautiful clear sky, certainly not to be mistaken for color contacts.

“kuWA*anger* – Souma you're so dead, I wanna stroke Reina-tan too –”

“Masaru, just give up.”

This guy even has a thing for lolis. So you don't care as long as they're hot huh.

But still, I can't call Masaru a pervert for being fond of Reina A. Ayase. Same as before, this is because many hordes of men have also fallen victim to this girl's charm.

Certainly, seeing this kind of energetic yet naïve character, I, who am not a lolicon, too can understand that the protective instincts of a man are roused by this small, thin girl.

Though I say that, I'm still not rooting for Masaru even a bit. At the very least, I want him to show some sincerity and pick one of the two he really wants to go for.

And leaving aside my friend who is currently burning in jealousy, there is Souma Yuuto who has Sakura and Reina, a flower in both arms – or rather to him, they must be the annoying sister and the spoiled childhood friend putting him in a difficult situation yet again. But reality is that he's super close to two first rate hotties, and is even surrounded by kind friends he can rely on, having just a swell time. Is that really the correct way to spend youth?

I have not fallen for Souma Sakura, nor have I feelings for Reina A. Ayase, but seeing Souma Yuuto's, this kind of lifestyle makes me feel an absolute inferiority even if I don't want to.

No let's stop, it's a stupid way to think. He's him, and I'm me.

He's but a special exception. Because I see this rosy life in front of me everyday in class, I tend to forget just how much of an exception he is. Grade school, and middle school never had an existence to cause this kind of overwhelming inferiority.

I have a friend in class too. And we too spend everyday having fun with stupid conversations. I also enjoy writing my edgychuuni light novels while desperately trying to make the literature club magazine deadline. After confirming that my own school life is more than satisfactory, the petty and meaningless inferiority complex quickly disappears.

I do think I want to get along better with girls, but thinking of how that's a

problem faced by the mass majority of Japanese male students makes it much less painful.

“Mm, the chime should ring any moment now.”

Casually looking at the wall clock in the classroom, the needle is only a minute away from the first chime.

The homeroom teacher may appear just before the chime rings, so as I stand up to return to my own seat, it happens. The classroom door opens with a sharp rattle and two people come rolling in.

“Do – n’t pull so hard, Ryoko! C’mon it’s fine being a li’l late right?”

“Shut up, Ryuichi, just get to your seat.”

With such an exchange, our class 2–7 class rep. Kisaragi Ryoko, grabbing Tendou Ryuichi by the hand, bursts in and crosses the front of the classroom with her shoulder length hair in a flutter.

Kisaragi-san, a tall and slender, with cool eyes in depthless spectacles, a sharp-looking beauty, standing beside the large and handsome Tendou-kun, doesn’t look out of place at all. No, it can be said that she’s the only one who has a rightful place beside him.

“Sup Ryuichi, got caught by the rep. again?”

“Yea, just my luck. My morning joint was ruined all thanks to that.”

To Souma-kun’s refreshing greeting, Tendou-kun returns a truly dissatisfied reply.

“Joint? What, you have cigarettes on you? Take them out now, Ryuichi.”

“H-hey wait, the price got higher just the other day, so don’t take the one I haven’t even open –”

“Yup, no more of that.”

The hundred yen yet unopened box of cigarettes were nimbly pulled out from the front pocket of his uniformgakuran by Kisaragi-san.

Having his relief goods seized without mercy, Tendou-kun complains without giving in, but Kisaragi-san’s stoic face and cold eyes pay no consideration to his

desperate claims.

Fuck, not my lucky day, as the boy complains, his long time best friend Souma-kun gives him words of consolation. Yup, with that refreshing smile,

“Not like you want to, but good job keeping this up every morning, you too class rep.”

He said in a somewhat given up tone, a statement even I can wholeheartedly agree with.

Barely making the first chime, this super serious class rep. dragging in our greatest delinquent to class is a daily scene for the class of 2–7. Kisaragi-san somehow finds this Tendou-kun from anywhere he may intend to go ditching class, and forcefully makes sure he’s there during role call.

She herself insists it’s her job as class rep. to do this, but no matter how you look at it, this is clearly outside her job description. As a result, the fact that she’s doing this because she ‘wants to’ is only unknown to herself, and has been made an undeniable truth in the class of 2–7.

That aside, with the meddlesome class rep. bringing in the blonde haired delinquent with her before the first chime, all of Shiramine Academy, class 2–7, have gathered in the classroom.

I look at the clock a 2nd time and, the minute hand is just about to make its tiny mechanical sound and denote the instant of when the chime would sound. Holidays aside, it is a sound I hear everyday, the ding-dong-dang-dong melody that any student would be very familiar with but—

GI, GIGIGI, GI – IIIIIIII!!

That unpleasant metallic sound rang throughout the classroom.

Plugging the ears is something not only me, but everyone in the classroom did almost reflexively. There’s also the cute ‘Kya – ‘s coming from girls scattered about.

There’s the usual ting sound of the of the intercom speakers – no this sound is much more painful! Kuu*groan*, I got a bad feeling...

This shrill noise echoing in from all 360 degrees around this classroom felt

absolutely nauseating. In my brief 17 years of life, I've never experienced such a terrible stomach churning sound.

Well, with not yet getting sick enough to actually throw up, the sound stopped.

What in the world was that sound, these kinds of mutterings from practically everyone's mouths filled the classroom.

At that time, something happened yet again – suddenly, as if a candle being blown out, all light from the classroom disappeared.

“Eh, blackout!?”

The situation worsens, as we lost all sources of light, enough to submerge my chubby friend in front of me into complete darkness.

Though it was I myself who claimed it was a blackout, looking at the current situation, that theory is instantly denied.

For right now, it is morning. The time is 8:45 am. Today's forecast, continuing from yesterday, another clear autumn sky. Though the windows weren't open like in the summer, the uncurtained windows let the gentle sunlight splash into the big classroom. At least, until 2 seconds ago.

Wait, why, why is it dark even outside?

The inside of the classroom became rowdier. Not only screaming from girls but some boys' ones were mixed in there too. Or rather, their angry voices were.

I'd said nothing more after my previous statement. But I recognised the bizarreness of the situation as well, and had broken out in a cold sweat.

“O-oi Kotaro, what's up with this, why's it gone dark all a sudden? This some kinda prank show?”

Masaru's voice had a clearly anxious tremble, but I wasn't in a state to make fun of him for that. I'm shaken up just as well.

“D-donno man... but it doesn't seem like one at least?”

A blackout is more than probable, realistically speaking. However, I can't

really imagine a method of instantly blocking all the windows and blanketing the whole classroom in complete darkness. It is a strangeness I can't even hypothesize about.

Of course, uncertain about what this abnormality is, there's no finding the cause or the resolution for it. And from the uproar all around, I don't think anyone in class has any idea either.

As the class was falling deeper into panic, this time, the lights turned back on.

The fluorescent lights on the ceiling lit up, filling the place with their artificial white light, like it was a matter of course.

"Ah, its back."

I ended up speaking out.

Well, that was probably the general feeling of everyone here, and for now, the brighter classroom dispelled the fear of darkness, and ameliorated the situation.

But, it was not like everything went back to normal.

"Oi, look out the window!"

I don't know who said this, but even without the alert, the abnormality was easy to discover.

"It's pitch black."

Yeah, Masaru replies. Just like everyone else, the two of us sitting on the hallway side of the room stared dumbfounded at the other side of the window shrouded in absolute darkness.

"The hell, I can't see shit."

"Should I open it?"

"Stop dumbass, that's just screams bad idea"

A group of guys on the window side of the room were having this dialogue. Not opening the windows was probably the consensus among the whole class.

As if painted with a coat of black, the windows reflected nothing at all.

Though it was difficult to understand, the class that began to recognize this obvious bizarreness, once again plunged into a state of anxiety filled mutterings.

As the room began filling up with miscellaneous voices – within all the bustle, what’s this sound... This is, from the intercom speakers where the chime usually goes off, comes a sound like that of a sandstorm!

Once I noticed it, I could clearly hear this grizzly sound. No, it was definitely getting louder.

“Guys, quiet down a bit. Something’s coming from the intercom.”

The one who silenced the class with that one statement was not me, but Souma Yuuto. He seems to have heard the noise from the speaker same as me.

Well, unlike me with my chubster friend here, he’s in the blessed position of having beautiful sister snuggled to his right shoulder, and a cute childhood friend nestled on his left arm.

Anyway, with his help, my classmates all noticed the noise, and hoping for some rescue info, began to listen attentively at the speaker.

In the silenced classroom, the sandstorm like noise somehow started to resemble human speech.

“Ca... he...r me”

I have no idea what they’re saying, but that was unmistakably a voice. Like a radio being tuned, the voice slowly but surely became clear.

“Can you hear me?”

Is that a male teacher? Slowly, a gentle voice sounded clearly from the speaker.

Even if you ask if we can hear you, obviously no one’s gonna answer. Everyone kept their silence and paid attention to the man’s voice.

“Good, seems like my voice is connecting fine.”

It’s almost like he knows everything that’s going on here. Though I’m not unable to read the mood and won’t voice out that opinion.

“First, please calm down and listen. You are all, right now, about to fall into grave danger. That too, not something realistic like an earthquake or typhoon.”

A slight anxiety runs throughout the classroom.

Even though I denied this being some part of a prank show, having the irregularity of the situation properly declared, fills me in great anxiety and tension. Never mind the goosebumps and endless trembling.

“You are all currently en route to a completely different place, another world in fact, from the place called Japan on Earth.”

I reflexively let out that sound. Though it was still much better than the slowly bubbling panic in the classroom.

“To you who have been living in a world without magic, my words may seem sudden and doubtful. But right now, we don’t have the time. Before you’re stranded on this dangerous place, I hope you can follow my instructions.”

Um, hey, the story’s getting a bit weird here...

My pulse is rising like an alarm bell, and my body, trembling from a full power sense of danger.

Another world? Magic? Dangerous place? All of these were jargon completely alien to normal life. If I had to guess, it could be some mysterious recreation forced upon us by the school. But even emergency drills would have a more believable story.

Though, looking out the window into the piercing darkness, we must admit, even reluctantly, that we are, right now, in fact not in a daily life situation, but one so irregular that literally anything could happen.

No one could just laugh off this bizarre explanation.

“You probably possess paper and pens. First, please look at the markings, Magic Formations and Incantations, drawn here and copy them down.”

At those words, everyone here had a question mark above their heads. This man has been speaking from the other side of the intercom, apparently from another world with magic, and who knows if he’s using a mic, but still he has no means to get any visual information.

But that one doubt was certainly answered. As right then, the 41 students of this class 2–7, including me, paid witness to the existence of magic.

“U-ua, it’s drawing on its own...”

Everyone’s eyes were now focused on, perhaps the thing that occupies the vast majority of a student’s visual focus, the blackboard.

There, on that characteristic dark-green surface of the blackboard, a white line was dancing by itself.

Not like anyone’s using a chalk. First of all, along with the line being drawn, the faint light being given off, not from a cathode-ray tube or liquid crystal screen, but an everyday blackboard was truly very magical.

As everyone was speechlessly staring at the blackboard, within a minute the magic inscription is completed.

“Now then, do copy down this Magic Formation and Incantation. With this, you can get our support wherever you are. I will explain the usage in three minutes’ time, but for now, concentrate on this task.”

With that, the voice from the speaker came to a pause.

“Guys, for now, let’s sit down and get these down in our notebooks.”

As we were debating on what to do, the calm voice of Souma Yuuto is heard.

Right now, having to face such a mysterious phenomenon, that voice seemed highly trustworthy. It’s probably better to quietly follow his instructions and not have any weird suspicions.

Without any particular reluctance, the students quickly reaching their seats, taking out their notebook from their bags, and writing down what’s on the board, was a fine show of honed Japanese student behaviour. Of course, I’m also included in that description.

And then, just like in a time-constrained test, the classroom is dominated by silence.

From my seat at the very back of the hallway side, I carefully regarded the magic-drawn characters on the blackboard, while swiftly running a pen on my slim notebook.

The shapes weren't all that complicated so there's no chance to get them wrong, and the incantation was also conveniently written in Japanese.

At the center of the board was drawn a simple magic circle similar to a coin. The middle of it had a cross-like shape, and around it and running along the inner and outer circumferences of the circle were alphabet-like letters. Of course, I've never seen any magic circle like this.

Meanwhile, the incantation written in Japanese reads:

"Oh Gods above, grant us salvation with the force of thy miracles. For we shall adhere to thine decree."

So it was this obviously pandering to the gods for help kind of statement. Very neat handwriting though.

By the way, there were no meaningsfurigana attached to any of the wordskanji, but students who couldn't understandreadwordskanji at this level would probably not be found at a famous university prep school like Shiramine Academy.

And as I finished copying down the formation and incantation, I stuffed my campus notebook back into my bag.

The unknown man's voice wasn't here yet. There's likely around another minute of time left, so as I attempt to make sure from the wall clock, the hands are stuck at 8:45. Well, I don't really feel like getting my phone out to check. I'll just be patient.

And, with this free time at hand, naturally I look around the classroom to see what's going on. Looks like almost everyone's pretty much done.

Many have finished up with their note-taking and are whispering with their surroundings or taking a pic of the blackboard with their phonestmartphones.

Speaking of phones, of course many tried to contacting the outside, but all forms of signals happen to be out of range, is something I deduced from the chattering. I also attempted to use my phone, and as expected, it was to no avail. By the way, mine happens to be a flip phone. I'm pretty much broke.

Well, even though its another world, it'll probably prove useful at some point.

Suppressing the ever-increasing uneasiness in my heart, I stuff the phone into the depths of my bag. Since no one's gonna be calling anyway, I turn the power off too.

At that moment, something small and white rolled in towards my feet. Its momentum coming to a rest from hitting my indoor shoes, wearing a black, white and blue striped sleeve, a product from the same brand I happen to use as well, it was an eraser.

Probably belongs to the next seat over. Without thinking too hard, I almost reflexively picked up the eraser.

"Futaba-san, yours?"

"Y-y-yeah, thank you Momokawa-kun."

The one receiving back her misplaced item in the most nervous way was the female student seated on the desk next to mine, Futaba Meiko.

She was one who could stand proud as one of those, like Souma Yuuto, Souma Sakura, or Reina A. Ayase, who happen 'stand out' in this class of 2-7. This is not attributed to her beauty however. It's more of a, like, mass related thing.

Futaba Meiko was a big girl. Both horizontally and vertically.

Right now, she was taking the eraser from me, yet she was already a head taller than me. If we take my height of 150cm then she looks almost breaking past 180cm 5ft 11.

On top of that, she boasted a girth comparable to that of Saitou Masaru. If standing side-by-side with the tiny old me, one could think there was something wrong with the scaling factor of reality.

Fluffy, semi-long hair, a round face matching the body, and gentle downturned eyes which somehow made you think of a cow. The face, I thought was fairly pretty.

But more importantly, those rich breasts gave her an strong image of a milking cow. Right now, her chest which seemed want to burst out from the sailor uniform in front of me, really accentuated their enormity. They're like the

size of my head – I’m honestly made a bit excited. Men are weak to boobs. Especially if its me, the type who likes em big and loves em even bigger.

Shaking off those impure thoughts, I go ahead and turn away from my glance. Yes, I do have at least that much modesty. This girl by the name of Futaba Meiko and myself have no relation other than that of having our seats next to each other. Now that I think of it, this returning of her eraser was likely our first words to each other.

While I don’t think much of anything of her other than her chest, at some point in time, I hear some girls from class started calling her with a horrible nickname like ‘Butaba’, which not only reminds me how frightening women can be, but also instigates a slight pity for her.^[5]

Anyway, perhaps because of that tiny bit of pity, as I see Futaba-san’s notebook on top of her desk, with a crooked magic circle having already been drawn and erased several times, without much thought, I spoke up.

“Um, the formation, not done drawing?”

“Eh, Ah... Yeah.”

Her round but somehow lovable face is distorted in a frown, actually, her eyes are also moist with tears.

Even without asking, that her mental state was confused and afraid due to our current happenstances was obvious. She may be double my size, but that doesn’t change the fact that her mind was that of a simple teenage girl.

She may just be a klutz, but I could easily see she was shaken enough to not be able to draw the magic circle on the board.

I take the notebook back out from my bag and, tearing off the page with the formation and the incantation, I hand it to Futaba-san.

“Eh, umm, this is”

“We don’t know what could happen, it’s better to have this.”

Her round eyes opened wide with a start, and looked dumbfounded. But, there’s no time for chit-chat. Right after leaving the torn off page on Futaba-san’s desk, I recreated my own copy of the contents of the board.

“T-thankyou, Momokawa-kun!”

Still seated, I receive Futaba-san’s thanks to which I reply with a curt ‘Mhm’ while running my pen. Getting a sincere thankyou from, a girl doesn’t feel bad at all, or rather, it makes me a bit shy.

Her voice, surprisingly sweet in contrast to her figure, and that thick physique, with those extraordinarily large breasts that give an alluring jiggle as she lowers her head, also happens to contribute to my shyness.

“Now then, That’s 3 minutes. If you haven’t finished writing, please continue until you’re done. However, please try and not miss the following explanation.”

And with the continuation of the broadcast, I barely managed to finish up. Damn, that was close.

“It is simple to use this magic formation. You just have to put your hand over the drawing and speak the incantation. If you try it out now, the magic won’t activate. When you’ve completely arrived to this world, it will become possible.”

Some early birds were already trying out the described method of usage, but after hearing that condition, slightly embarrassed, they closed their notebooks.

“Using this magic would allow you to, with the help of the God whose name is inscribed on the formation, receive packets of information from our side. I believe you can understand better if I say texting?”

Not a phone call but text messaging, which would mean that they wouldn’t send instructions through sound. Though it’s magic, it probably comes with its own set of inconveniences.

“Basically, if you proceed according to the instructions, you should make it out fine. But, before you reach a place under our protection, there will likely be many dangers lying in wait. The principal of which would be entities known as ‘Monsters’. But please rest assured, you would already have become residents of this other world. Implying, you would be able to wield powers impossible in your previous life. You would even be able to harness magic. Using those powers, you will surely beat the monsters, and escape from danger.”

The man’s hot-blooded words tempted many of the boys into saying “Oh,

sounds fun, it's like an RPG" in a carefree way.

Yeah no, that's pretty much impossible mode, like, if you can't muster enough power, isn't it a permadeath?

According to the man, these monsters which are a known danger to humans will surely be encountered by us. In the first place, we have to play survival on some strange unknown land. To top it off, if there're these monsters that actively prey on humans...this is too much.

This isn't some damn game. We're heading into another world, not some yet to be invented Virtual Reality adventure.

Attacking isn't a simple task of pushing a button and having the command sent and action automatically performed. We have to move using our own wills, our own bodies.

You can tell me about all the powers you want, but there's no guarantee I can bring out 100% of their potential. And there's even the high possibility that, faced with these fearsome monsters, we'd be completely unable to move out of fear. Especially for a weakling like me, it's a death sentence.

Even in the real world, a fight where I actually hit someone, my experience of those from the lower years of grade school were the last. Just yesterday I almost pissed myself in front of that group of 4. Actually, forget monsters, I have the confidence to lose even against a stray cat, if it went all out.

But unfortunately, this thing called a fight may just be impossible to avoid from here on out.

Yeah, I'm pretty much dead...

My face right now is definitely so pale, there probably isn't a more pathetic one possible. No really, I'd cry if I wasn't in public.

But, it seems I have some kindred spirits. Girls who are weak-willed are already producing sniffing sounds. Among them, was the large bodied Futaba Meiko sitting next to myself.

"Now then, we're almost out of time. It is dangerous to stay inside this room. Get your things and get ready to head out."

The man's words forcibly move the plot along.

At this point, I can't just keep being pessimistic. With a small burst of courage, I stop my trembling body and, for now, start working. Picking up my commuting bag after shoving the magic circle notebook inside, I realize.

We're gonna be in this survival situation so textbooks are pretty much useless.

Paper could be useful for starting a fire, but that's no reason to walk around with something this heavy. It's obviously better to have a light load when escaping from monsters.

In contrast, as we know that magic formations and incantations exist, there is value in having notebooks to gather information in. Let's see, not too heavy, so I'll... OK, I'll leave only 2 in the bag.

As I look around the classroom, everyone's also getting ready for 'heading out' as the man said.

I'm of the literature club, so whether it's Souma Yuuto's wooden sword, his sisters bow, or a bat belonging to a baseball club member, I don't possess any such club related equipment.

Shit, the guys from the activity oriented clubs sure are in luck. I curse at them internally.

It's much more reassuring to be armed rather than not, and a bow can even give the possibility of ranged combat from a safe distance. On top of that, having been practicing with them every day, those people are actually competent in their usage. Compared to some newbie, this is a serious advantage.

That being said, it doesn't mean it's ok to swipe that sword bag from Souma-kun. There's probably some others who've also realized the same thing.

Unlike the plain old delinquent Tendou Ryuichi, the other more heinous class punk, Higuchi Kyouya, has been leering at the Souma siblings with an openly bitter expression. Well, not like he'd actually try to attack someone like Souma-kun.

Higuchi Kyouya is tall and has a pretty good build, but just physical strength won't be enough to topple Souma-kun.

Well leaving aside the punkDQN, right now the safe bet would be to get protected by Souma-kun or Tendou-kun. To that end, it's unfavorable to cause any chaos with those two.^[6]

With that thought, I went to the back of the room where the shelves are, to retrieve the bag with my jersey. Since this is a survival, having another set of clothes is a priority.

My commuting bag, now free from the greatest deadweights known as textbooks and printouts, has more than enough space. I shove in the jersey with its bag whole.

Maybe they're following my lead, but some others are also getting their jerseys. Well, the jersey aside, do they really need that half-sleeves shirt and shorts soccer uniform?

"Soon, we will open the door leading outside. On my signal, leap out of this room."

As the class was still getting ready, along with the man's broadcasted voice, both doors of the classroom flew open with a rattle. Naturally, it was like an automatic movement which didn't require anyone's input.

Beyond the sliding doors, wasn't the familiar school hallways, but similar to the windows, a piercing darkness with no end in sight. Me being at the very back of the hallway side desks meant that I was the closest to the rear door and consequently, at the best position to peer into that darkness.

Uwa... Is it ok to jump from here? At least give us some kind of light producing magic.

Aside from wanting some convenient magic, everyone seems to have the common feeling of deep anxiety from this ominous darkness.

Looking dumbly at the door, no one had the courage or guts to take the initiative, and make a leap of faith.

"Hey, uh, this really the only way to do this?"

Perhaps worried about me at the very back and so close to the door, Masaru spoke up.

Right now, Masaru in the going-home club has, just like me, only his bag with the jersey, but he also has his self protection short-sword in there. Wait, will his dual-sword arts style techniques finally show their might... forgetting such jokes, right now I look again at the ominous exit before me.

“Yeah, really can’t see anything. Don’t really feel like jumping in either.”

And just as I state my humble opinion.

“Now, quickly line up neatly in front of the door. The collapse should begin any moment now, but do not panic, wait for the signal.”

Came the man’s anxiety inducing explanation.

C-collapse, say what now... in the middle of that thought, screams from girls as well as boys rise from the window side.

“Kyaaa! It’s breaking, something’s breaking!?”

“Jeesus! This is seriously bad!”

Collapse, just as the word says. I see the windows, walls, and even the floor covered in black cracks, being swallowed up by the darkness outside. Seeing a wall with a window crumbling, the white curtains then fluttering, disappearing into the abyss gave me a truly strange impression.

The danger finally having made its appearance, the anxious and high tension classroom derailed into a raging panic all at once.

Especially, the window side students who begin fleeing towards us at the hallway side.

“Fuck, move it fatass!!”

I hear this remarkably loud roar.

Seated close to the window side, Higuchi Kyouya made a rush towards here with the likeness of a demononi, and to the one standing in his way, no rather, the one just stiffened up in this moment of crisis – anywho, there was Futaba Meiko and her large self standing there.

As if looking at trash, Higuchi shoved Futaba-san away with full force like some inanimate obstacle.

With a high-pitched cry, her body is driven back in long strides.

Her seat was right next to mine. As in, she's right in front of me. As in, if she were to go backwards...

With Futaba-san's back closing in, I remember the time in grade school when we saw the horrific scene of a 10 tonne truck slamming into a plastic dummy in a traffic safety class.

My head occupied by that image, I simply could not react to this sudden development.

I just saw this huge butt projecting out towards me in something like slow-motion.

"Fugyaa!!"

Raising a cry like a cat that had its tail stepped on, I am blown away all too quickly by Futaba-san's large behind.

"Ah, Kotaro!?"

The surprised voice of my friend seemed awfully far. And that, was the last thing I'd heard from that classroom.

I see the light escaping from the classroom door moving away at fearsome speeds. Soon enough, that box of light became a dot, and then dissolved into complete darkness.

I see nothing, I hear nothing. I feel nothing. In the deafening silence, finally, I even lost my consciousness.

[1]Some preferences. I will use honorifics rather than localize them. Also, for some terms like nii-san, aniki, *etc.* I will leave them as is and provide a ruby text meaning the first time. Names are written surname first in the raw and I'll go with that as well. As you may have noticed, whenever I do localize something, I try to put the romaji on top. Onomatopoeia/sound words, are mostly left as is, sometimes I provide a meaning on top. Finally, these preferences are not final. Let me know if you know a better way.

[2]The schools name is either Shiramine or Hakurei. Not quite sure which reading.

[3]Event, flag: galge/eroge terms.

[4]Yamato Nadeshiko: “personification of an idealized Japanese woman” ...
(wiki)

[5]Buta = pig, so buta + Futaba = Butaba.

[6]DQN, pronounced dokyun, it means someone really foolish. Though, I’ve seen it used for delinquents and gangsters.

Chapter 2: Vocation “Shaman”

I open my eyes to the cold sensation of water droplets splashing on my cheeks.

“Ah... I’m alive.”

No gaps in memory or dizziness. I only spoke out some dramatic lies about being alive because, flung out of the classroom via Futaba-san’s big ass and falling into the abyss, I had prepared myself for death.

T-that was close.

My limbs are still attached, and actually, the fact that I don’t have a single scratch on me is to be super grateful for. I feel like I could write a whole essay on the splendor of nature.

Well, even with feeling this great and experiencing the surrounding nature with all my eyes, ears and skin, the way down here was the same as a 90 degree straight vertical descent.

Spread out before me is a verdant forest of such grandeur that the more or less 500m high hill I climbed at an outdoor excursion before doesn’t even hold a candle.

I’ll, be fine right...

I can’t think there’s any escaping back to civilized land from the middle of this lush, dense forest that you only get to see on wild animal documentaries.

About my personal experience with the great outdoors, there was the two days one night camping trip with my folks. Well, rather than a test of mettle and resourcefulness, it was pretty much completely leisure.

But still, what a view. Whether you look left or right, you find trees, with more than the accumulated girth of five people, right in your face. These giants of green grow far into the sky, and with their large leaves, shroud the heavens enough to make it hard to find the sun.

Though it’s not completely dark, the creeping despair in my heart makes the

place feel coated in pitch black.

But there is in fact a brighter side to this.

“Right, the magic circle!”

I never thought I could be this smart.

Matter of fact, as I just noticed I was holding onto my bag, it’s not like I had any memory loss, I easily remember what that man said about magic and whatnot.

Thereafter, I opened my bag, took out the notebook, and on the slightly damp, bare ground, put down the page with the circle drawn, all within a minute.

“Umm, so like, I just have to put my hand on this and chant the incantation... right?”

I try to remember if there was anything else, nope, that much should be it. I didn’t forget even though I only heard once, it was rather very clear and simple.

“Right, let’s do this!”

If I keep meandering about it, I’ll start wandering into increasingly negative thoughts like, what if I can’t do it, what if the magic doesn’t work *etc.* so for now, I’ll just suck up my guts, and wing this magic business.

“Oh Gods above, grant us salvation with the force of thy miracles-”

This magic circle was drawn with a ballpen, more like a rough sketch really. But as soon as I put my right hand there, and recited that one phrase, the magic really began to show effect.

Those lines of ordinary black ink began to shine white under my hand. A light much in similar to when it’s original was drawn on the blackboard.

There was a slight shock at the appearance of actual magic right there, but so as not to interrupt the casting, I calmly, slowly, precisely, continued the rest of the incantation.

“-For we shall adhere to thine decree.”

And right as I finished.

On the back of my hand that was placed above the notebook, a magic formation just like the one below, no, a similar one with some of the markings missing, shone with a poisonous looking red light.

As if the back of the hand was imprinted with the brand of the magic circle.

But rather than that bizarre phenomenon—

“u, ah, gyaaaaaaaaa!”

I raised a scream unable to bear the sudden sharp pain that engulfed my whole body.

Ow! ow ow it hurts it hurts dammit— even in my head, it’s only screams. A fearsome pain, the first of its kind I’ve felt in my whole life. As if I was captured by some evil organization and subjected to torture, it was an unforgiving, horrible suffering.

Ah, I’m done, I’ll die.

As I had that feeling, my surroundings once again experienced a blackout. Like the lights going out at the flick of a switch, my consciousness was lost.

I hear a voice.

“هوى، مؤمن أو ظهرت في عدة أيام”

Ah, pardon me, can you repeat that in Japanese? My English is severely lacking.

“الآن، يمكنك حتى دون فهم، لا يهم”

I see, I see, Can you Kan nut speak Japaniz... No, wait a sec. Who cares about the language barrier.

I’m still alive.

Just as I realize this, I jumped straight up, and shot my eyelids open.

I’m conscious, my body moves, I can see too. I’m not dead yet—

“Yeah no... I am dead...”

This must be the place known popularly as Hell. I can’t help but think that.

What reflects in my eyes, is the same pitch darkness I watched as I fell from

the classroom just now. I can't even tell if I'm standing or floating in zero gravity.

Well, the location doesn't really matter right now. Certainly, it's not the bottommost priority, but a more important existence is standing in front of me. Right, in, front of me.

“ليس مخيفا”

Yes, the person in who's been speaking to me for the past while in English or who knows what language — was a Grim ReaperShinigami

If you see a skeleton in black, what else can you think? From under the deep hood, a skull with not a shred of meat or skin peeks out. In the depths of those abyssal eye sockets shine an ominous crimson light.

He's around a head taller than me. That in and of itself is a normal height, but regrettably, in front of a talking skull, I can't really fall back on common sense.

[1]

“E-ek... Excuse me...”

Please just spare my life, will something like that get through? Like, this is Hell, and the Reaper is speaking some strange language. But, I have to at least say it.

“Pleas– Fugya!?”

I couldn't even plead for my life.

The Reaper's hand suddenly gripped onto my head. I feel the surprisingly cold, hard texture of the bony palm. Is he gonna tear out my spine now?

“انه لامر مؤلم قليلا، ولكن لا تجعل مثل هذه الضجة على”

My head wasn't plucked off. Instead, the finger was jammed in. Right into my brain.

Uwaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!

Still grabbing my head, the Reaper's index finger pierces in. Of course, I can't see what's happening on top of my head. I can't see, but I can tell.

That right now, the sharp pointed tip of the finger is vigorously stabbing into

my brain. I am made to clearly experience the disgusting feeling of having a fingertip on the inside of my cranium messing with my brain.

I let out a scream as soon as I felt that but– the real pain came a moment after.

I withstood the severe pain menacing my brain for perhaps a minute or maybe 10. Or maybe it lasted no more than 10 seconds.

I'd fallen unconscious. I noticed it as I was screaming till my throat felt broken, at which point I saw the Reaper take out his finger from my head.

“Name thyself, devotee.”

I hear the Reaper's voice. Now that I hear it again, it's still a mysterious tone. Like a man, or a woman. Like someone aged, or in their infancy. I can't tell at all.

Well fine, more importantly... it's about understanding what he's saying. And about that, I'm just hearing plain Japanese.

“Make haste, thy name.”

“M-momokawa... Kotarou.”

I somehow answer. If I don't, I might really die this time. Or maybe, it'll be two fingers next.

“Momokawa Kotarou, as for now, thou hast but two things to recall.”

Ha? I mutter dumbly, but still concentrate fully on the Reaper's words. If I went and said “Say what now?”, he'll probably kill me right there. Or maybe even three fingers.

We are called “Curse God Ruinhilde” and thine “Vocation” tenshoku is–

What was that? I really wanted to ask. With a strangely long Western style name, he's saying something about an occupation tenshoku or job changetenshoku or whatever. I'm still a student you know.^[2]

But in reality, I only let out a listless “huh.”

“-Shaman.”

As he thus declared, my heart is pierced. Along with the student handbook in my uniform's sakuran breast pocket, the bony hand thrust into and deeply

gouged into the left side of my chest.

“We have thus established the contract. Now, Momokawa Kotarou. We greatly anticipate thine following encounter with us.”

With those words reaching my ears, I’d already fallen—

A “Vocation” would be job granted to man from the heavens. As in, literally, God personally chooses an occupation perfect for the person and gives it to them.

The students of Shiramine Academy class 2–7 will all be granted vocations by battle oriented Gods, apparently. If you can’t fight, you’ll simply die, there’s no other choice.

Indeed, this granting of a vocation directly implies the attribution of the God’s divine protection, in other words, the ability to wield special skills.

For example, if you get the vocation of “Warrior”, you can use hand-held weapons to deal mighty blows. As for a “Fire Mage”, you can use magic to launch scorching balls of flame.

However, one must not get arrogant with this power. A beginner who just acquired a vocation, cannot unleash much. By repeatedly using this power, or perhaps by overcoming special conditions or trials set by God, the abilities from the vocation will grow strong.

Meaning, the students who just received God’s protection, must give top priority to honing their vocation, fighting monsters, growing their skills, is the only and best way to survive.

“...Aha, I see now.”

In the hands of my talking-to-himself self, is one of the notebooks. On the page where the magic circle was hand-drawn in black ballpen ink, these sentences were being displayed with a light not unlike that of a PC monitor.

So like the man had said, the “magic that sends information like texting” seems to be working.

What is being displayed, is information on vocations. But the text only showed up on the page with the magic circle. You can’t scroll the surface, and it

doesn't seem like it will be updated, it can probably only do that one page. Rather than a phone, it's like some shitty pager.

"Shamanism granted by Curse God Ruinhilde...huh."

I woke back up in the forest just 5 minutes ago. I'd seen this horrible nightmare just now, but the magic on the notebook activated and I got a nice distraction.

And as I read through the information, I began to better understand the nightmare.

That was basically, a ritual performed by God for granting the vocation. It's a God of curse, I can understand him being a skeleton, and doing those painful things, or rather, things that would literally end you if done in real life, is something I don't really agree with, but I get that it's that sort of thing.

"Right, first I gotta see how these shaman powers work."

Luckily, or I should say, already, there's a feeling of change having occurred in my body. I'm already under the influence of the vocation.

Me comprehending the language of this other world is the foremost proof of that.

That Grim Reaper aka Curse God Ruinhilde's words started to make sense right after he was done messing with my brain. I think that it was some kind of translation magic directly engraved into me.

And the decisive proof of that were the words I was reading on the notebook just now. That was actually not in Japanese, but in an alphabet I've never seen before. Despite that, I was able to smoothly go on reading it with no trouble at all.

Yet to be known memories and knowledge have been engraved into my mind. Knowing something I'm not supposed to know gives me quite the creepy feeling, but no choice but to rely on it at this point.

I look through the newly input memories. As I focus my consciousness on that... Sure enough, I see it.

"This is... an incantation."

“Coming to mind, is a short phrase. This is a magic— no, as I am a shaman, this should be called “Curse” jujutsu I guess. In any case, I get that this phrase is the necessary aria to activate the curse.^[3]

Welp, here goes nothin’.

“Plunge into permanent swelter, and curse the body — “Red Fever””

Bam! I thrust out my right hand in an “I’mma shoot” kind of pose. But, it was pointless. As this is the kind of attack that only works with a target on hand.

Well, more importantly, I should consider the effectiveness of this curse of “Red Fever”.

“Red Fever”: gives the target a slight fever.

That was all the information about that available in my mind.

“Wha... What the...”

Slight fever? You mean the slight fever that makes your body heat up to around 37.5 degrees? 99.5 in Fahrenheit

And with that slight fevered condition, you can defeat monsters?

“Yeah right!?”

I just had to do that self-retort. What is this, this needlessly subtle effect. It’s not even a matter of strong or weak is it?

No well, I didn’t have the image of some flashy attack magic user when I heard about being a shaman. But c’mon, you can be just a bit generous and make it poison or something?

“Slight fever... my ass...”

If the target gets heated up during the fight anyway, doesn’t getting them slightly feverish seem pretty useless?

“No, wait, calm down, this must be one of those things that multiply in effect over multiple turns.”

I’ll unleash the full potential of my gamer brain and RPG knowledge, and definitely figure out a usage for this power.

That being said, the result is...

“Red Fever”: gives the target a slight fever.

No other info comes out.

I can't see this slight fever as anything other than giving slight cold symptoms, making the body slightly hot and tired. It's certainly not one-hit-KO immediate effect type attack that takes down monsters. And of course, it doesn't seem to increase the effect per turn, or rather, as time passes.

“P-probably can't hold them off either...”

Bad, unreasonably bad. I really rolled a trash skill there.

“Excuse me God, can you point me to the reset button? Please let me do the skill selection again, c'mon...”

“C-calm down! there's still hope, there's, two more... curses left!”

This was also in the notebook info pack, no matter the vocation you attain, at novice level, you receive 3 skills with it. No more, no less, exactly 3. It seems there're individual differences that determining what skills you are awarded though. I wonder if there are any special Rare Skills included in there. That much, the info didn't say.

Anyway, I still possess 2 more shaman skills aka curses.

Let's think like this: if the first one was super trashy, the other two must be super amazing skills. Everything's about balance. After all, since God is allocating these skills, it must be godly balanced.

“I begeth you, Ruinhilde-sama! Please giveth me some cheateth curses!”

And so I looked up the second curse.

“Pain Return”: Return any damage done to self back, as is, to the attacker.

W-wow! This one's totally some invincible reflection skill! No matter the dastardly beast, any wound to me will become a wound back to itself.

The moment I'm dead, they're dead too?!

“No, what the hell... Dead, in the end, I'm, just dead...”

The description in my mind clearly reads “damage done to self”. Meaning, as long as I’m not at 0 HP, it’ll dish it back with the same force.

For example, if I get flattened under the feet of some Indian elephant like monster, I’ll become pancake. And right after, the Indian Elephant monster will also suffer pressure death.

Indeed, it has the ability to beat any opponent, but having to trade your own life for it is a no go. It’s basically a single usage thing.

The ones satisfied with this kind of effect would be either, people out for revenge with no regards to their life, or some 1-man-1-life creed believing terrorist. I’m just some high schooler, and I really care for my life.^[4]

“Uwa... it’s getting worse and worse...”

I reflexively held my head and squatted down right there. Goddamit, got a bit of sand in my eyes...

“I beg you God... please, pleeease let the last one be...”

I hold a desperate prayer, hoping for this last one. If this one’s also a 0 offense...

“Intuition Pharmacy”: Effects of ingredients are known, somehow.

“AaAAA!”

Forget curse, this is just an appraisal skill! Not even a single, itty bitty bit of attack power in this. No attack, no defense, not even useful for evasion.

In the first place, with only some paper, pens, and a jersey, I have no ingredients at all to use to make medicine. And with nothing to appraise, the skill is completely useless.

At this point, it’s an even trashier skill than “Red Fever”.

“Ha, haha... No way... I must have some hidden 4th curse...”

No way there’s anything that convenient. I know myself best. God wouldn’t give me something like a cheat skill. Weell, if I was still in middle school, I might have believed in some hidden power.

Well, once you’ve met with one of those “chosen people”, you get it. That

yeah, you're not anyone special at all. I experienced this just the other day right?

I can't rely on God's blessing. Miracles won't happen either— In short, I gotta open the path I walk on with my own strength. As a person, it's only natural.

But, if there's none of that strength to begin with...

"Uu, it's the worst... Impossible, like... what is this, this skill selection, worst.game.everkusoge"

Whining pathetically like this, I lean back towards the towering, wide tree behind me as if collapsing.

Of course, being depressed like this isn't going to cause a change in these powers, and complaining like this won't help me find some game-like reset button and play from the start again.

Doesn't matter if I'm in a fantasy world with magic, reality is just that, reality.

"Ah... seriously, I'm stumped..."

Before something bad happens, should I commit suicide— No, dying is still way too scary, I can't. No matter what happens I didn't have the guts to kill myself.

Ah, but, I wonder if I can die painlessly if I eat these deadly looking poisonous red mushrooms growing down here.

I must be gazing at these red mushrooms growing at the base of this tree with empty, dead eyes.

If I eat this fly agaric-like poisonously-crimson with white polka dots mushroom, I can really die in a single— No, wrong. Eating this poison shroom will make you suffer in burning pain for a while, and put you on the brink of life and death.

Right now, I was strangely able to imagine what would happen if I eat this red mushroom in a super realistic way.

"I see, so this is Intuition Pharmacy."

This image inside my head isn't just my delusions, I have the utmost confidence in it. It's as if I have experienced eating this mushroom once before.

Seeing the effect of Intuition Pharmacy, suddenly roused my interest. I immediately got myself up and began carefully observing the mushroom.

I plucked out the red poison mushroom and looked at it closely. I knew by intuition that it's fine to touch bare-handed.

Right, as I thought, it looks surprisingly similar to the fly agaric I saw a picture of as a kid. But that similarity ends at the round umbrella like part, the trunk, no, for mushrooms, was it called the stalk? Anyway, the stalk has a red striped pattern, so it must be different.

This mushroom... probably works on monsters too.

Its effect shouldn't be limited to only humans. If eaten, almost anything should suffer a high fever.

"Might, just work."

As I stowed the shroom into my bag with this realization, I let out words of hope.

"Red Fever", "Pain Return", "Intuition Pharmacy", the 3 curses can't be used in battle by themselves.

But, if ingredients can be made into poisons or medicine, suddenly, my choices of action increase dramatically.

If wounded, I could treat it with herbs. With powerful poisons, I could maybe utilize them in defeating monsters. If it doesn't kill them, it should still give me the time to escape.

"Great, let's do this... it'll be alright, somehow, someday."

I'll definitely work something out. The reason? I still haven't the tiniest desire to die.

[1]I'm using 'he' for now. The original is ungendered.

[3]Jujutsu is normally Tled as magic/sorcery, but this should be appropriate too. I think. I'm taking liberties. All of MC's powers up till the current raw chapters seem curse-ish/spiritual

[4]Is that an Akumetsu reference?

Chapter 3: Monster

Awesome! Found herbs!

In great spirits, I collect some of the green, dandelion-leaf like, jagged grass growing at my feet. They didn't have flowers, and at a glance, seemed just like some ordinary weeds.

"Slight hemostatic effect huh... No, it's certainly better than nothing."

Speaking of herbs, there're ones you use raw, those you need to process and extract the essence from to get medical usage, and various other types.

Since I lack the knowledge, technique and equipment to compound and process medicine, I'm opting to collect the ones like these that can be used as is.

As for this herb... let's call it Non-delionfake dandelion, to use it, you apparently need to grind it into paste. I really want a pestle and mortar right about now, but complaining isn't going to help anyone. I just have to make do with the tools at hand.

Currently, the most promising item among my belongings is: the boxcutter. That common yellow one with the thicker black bottom part. To be honest, this thing inside my pencil case was a pain to carry, but now it's become a, primarily herb collection, and in case of emergencies, weaponizable ace of stationary.

Furthermore, the replacement blades (x10) sleeping deep in my bag, make for a reassuring extra supply.

However, the cutter's blade dulls before I know it. I need to use it as sparingly as possible. So I need to cut just till I can tear it off by hand.

"Right, this much should do."

Taking the accumulated bundle of these leaves in my hand, I store them into my bag in a practiced motion. Inside, there're only the red poisonous mushrooms, aka Red Shrooms, I'd first collected, so there's lots of room.

"Hm, next I... yup, I should follow this animal trail."

Me being this sure about the path wasn't something like my sense of direction being on par with that of migratory birds or something. In my hands I hold a magic compass. Technically speaking, it's the compass feature.

The magic circle on the notebook wasn't only good for texting, but had this feature to show the correct path via an arrow. From the inside of the circle, a large white arrow of light projects out.

This compass function, and above all, the place where this arrow is pointing towards, was explained just a while ago in an updated message.

According to that, we're in this woodland located far from human habitat and are supposed to head for these ancient ruins, the so-called 'dungeon'.

According to the plan, the students were supposed to awaken at this dungeon. Unfortunately, I woke up here in the forest, most likely, because I'd gone and did some sky diving, which slightly misaligned the landing destination.

In retrospect, that man had said "On my signal, leap out" so, though it's an accident, I'd ignored the signal, so I couldn't help but be left in my present predicament.

More like, jumping out at the wrong timing in this warp-like phenomenon, there's some stories where you have no idea where you'd end up, or maybe meet your end swallowed up by a spatio-temporal whirlpool or something, that it was only slightly misaligned must be some tremendous luck at work. On the other hand, I may have used up all my luck with that.

Anywho, so about this dungeon I'm headed to.

It is one that spreads deep underground like the inside of an ant hill. It seems that deep inside, there're devices called 'Transfer Gates' that instantly teleports you to a different place. Though the principle behind it wasn't explained, I get what they're trying to mean.^[1]

Meaning, we need to use these 'Transfer Gates' to escape.

The explanation states that the teleport destination is a country that's working to aid us.

It is the 'Astria Kingdom'. More specifically, it explains that we'd arrive at a

temple in the royal capital, but there wasn't any more details. Only the phrase, "We are a human nation, and we are ready to accept and protect other worlders like yourselves." was sent to reassure us.

Right now, there's no other choice than to believe in those words. Even if I do doubt it, it won't change the reality that I was thrown into this forest, and I really don't think there's any help coming from Japan.

So I need to bury down my anxiety and just keep moving.

"Huff... huff... T-this is tiring.."

Pathetic as it seems however, just keep moving wasn't something my poor physical specs could hope to achieve.

How long has it been since I picked up those Non-delion, and started walking? I don't think it's been over an hour, but being this out of breath just shows how rough the terrain is.

The animal trail I'm walking on was more or less cleaned up of any twigs and vegetation. But not only is the ground very uneven, but the uprooted giant trees standing in the way like a wall have to be climbed over too. It really drains stamina.

"I-I'll take a break"

I had no choice but to make that decision. And as if on cue, my stomach started grumbling. Now that I notice, the sense of hunger pangs at me. It's a bit early, but let's have lunch.

I stowed the magic notebook into my bag, and in exchange, took out my lunchboxbentou.

But, just as I open the lid of the black plastic lunchbox which my mother had probably filled with way too much last night.

I happen upon the thought, *is it really alright to chow down on every last bit like always?*

The danger imposed from the possibility of monster attacks can be somewhat taken care of with the use of this other world's mysterious power called the vocation. But next comes, *without the necessary equipment, or expertise, can I,*

a normal student, really survive this harsh survival lifestyle?

Food, water, shelter, warmth *etc.* even an amateur like me can think of many factors of anxiety. Even though it's a forest, I don't know if there's anything human edible here. And even if there were, I probably wouldn't be able to get a hold of them either.

Therefore, my last lifeline of food would be these helpings of rice and side-dishes distributed half-half inside this lunchbox. And the rest, would be this half finished 500ml plastic bottle PET bottle filled with an energy drink.

I'm worried about food, but water looks to be a problem too. Moving forward at this pace, it'll be gone all too fast. I have to get a refill somewhere, or else it's a one-way ticket to dehydration hell.

"L-let's hold off for now..."

I worried about the future, and made to close the lid on the lunchbox on my lap—

The bushes in front of me moved with a rustle. And just as I noticed it,
A steel-like dull gray bear appeared.

Stout and heavy log-like arms, the ends of which are garnered in long, sharp nails akin to knives. With these arms, which are practically weapons incarnate, on the ground, the beast walking on four legs, could certainly be called a bear at first glance.

However, though it's silhouette may resemble a bear, it's large frame was covered in a shell like that of a crab, which jutted out like thorns in places and shone with a metallic luster.

I imagine it'd reach 3 meters if it stood up tall. The great bear looked like it was armored in some steel shell. It's fearsome appearance was far from what'd be considered a wild animal, even humans would instinctively end up thinking, *I can't beat this.*

It finally hit me. This beast in front of me has to be one of the entities known as 'Monsters'.

"Hii...Aa..."

My small body was completely shaking with fear. The result: the lunchbox on my lap fell over.

The pre-cooked foods, deep fried sausage, chopped burdock, and lightly seasoned white rice. The precious food, slammed itself into the ground.

At that moment, the bear raised its snout and made a move.

Those shining red eyes were focused not on me, but on the contents of the lunchbox.

Right there is rich tasting food that would never exist in nature. The fragrance from which must have greatly provoked the monster's appetite. The bear was enthralled and thrust its snout into the fascinating food.

Now... I have to run right now!

I haven't completely become its target yet. Firmly believing which, I slowly move my trembling legs. Still facing forward, one step at a time, but certainly, I was moving farther from the monster indulging itself in sausages.

It's alright, the bear wants my lunch. I can get away now, I'll be able to get away now, please let get away!

Having started strongly praying to God, as if I've become unnaturally devout in the moment of crisis, I withdraw from the bear's luncheoning in baby steps.

My heart was pounding so hard it hurt, and though my body was supposed to be hot, my muscles felt like they were frozen over. Fear causing my head to boil over, I had no idea about anything anymore. In that manner, as if reality was somewhere far away, I continued my retreat in light footsteps.

Now that I think of it, I did well not to fall down walking backwards in that state. After getting 10 odd meters away, I finally turned and continued swiftly on the animal trail I've been on till now.

And pretty soon, the bear became hidden behind a giant tree and disappeared from sight.

"Huff...huf, huff... made it th- rough!?"

I breathed a hot sigh of relief when. I sensed very strongly from the Intuition Pharmacy- no, not that, from my own instinct. A gaze. With a monstrous

presence, something's, gaze.

Fearfully, I look back.

From the great tree's shadow, that monster, it was watching me.

"A... Aa... Uaa..."

It's coming for me.

I, having only just arrived at this other world, have no clue about the behaviour of monster, but I still understand. That bear, it's set me as the next prey.

I don't know if it's being wary, trying to intimidate, or just playing with me but, fortunately it's not making straight dash towards me. But in return, it's keeping its distance, from me who's slowly trying to get away, not getting closer or farther, just following.

If I'm remembering this right, I've heard real bears follow mountaineers just like this. It's all fine now, but not long from now, it's gonna realize that I'm easy prey, and attack.

I can't imagine out-running it. That monster looks like it's got a stiff, thick shell, but I doubt it's slower than humans.

Even if, it had the vitesse of an Earth bear, it's still impossible to get away on human legs. I heard that bears can go upto 50 kilometers31 miles / hour. They can cross 100 meters109 yards in around 7 seconds. The human limit being 9 seconds. There's no competition.

Escape impossible. Rescue— Ah, oh yeah, my classmates all started at the dungeon. Meaning, even if they searched, there's not a chance they'd look in the forest.

Only one choice left. This monster— let's call it the Armor Bear, I need to defeat it.^[2]

"No, impossible... like, no way, in any way..."

In my hands is a single, tiny little boxcutter. Even if I was equipped with a shotgun, I couldn't take on that thing.

Considering my vocation, Shaman's powers — 'Pain Return' can definitely kill the Armor Bear, but that'll be the end of me too. Yeah, that one's out.

Even with the much hopeful Intuition Pharmacy...there's only so much you can do, even with the Red Shroom. This'll only be effective when ingested orally. Should I go for an all-or-nothing bet and throw them at the Armor Bear's large mouth? The chance of success is abhorrently low.

"Fuck, fuckking hell... why's it gotta be this impossible..."

The more I think about, the more the chances seem to diminish.

And, mercilessly, time does not wait for me. How long will it take till the time limit to hits and the Armor Bear makes at me.

"No, Don't... I don't wanna... don't wanna die"

The idea I came up with after using up every bit of my grey matter, was only a way to buy some time.

Still walking, I unzip my bag and take out the jersey from inside. This one first.

"C'mon...please work!!"

Betting on this one hope, I gently release the jersey over the ground. And after advancing for a dozen or so meters, I peek behind.

"N-nice..."

There I see, putting its snout into my jersey and sniffing at it, the Armor Bear's figure.

When being chased by a wild bear, I've heard it's favourable to discard your belongings one at a time to distract the animal. Though it's merely a stop gap measure, and not an actual solution to the problem.

My rejoice was but short-lived. As if determining the item as not-food, the Armor Bear used it's sharp claws to tear apart my dark-blue school issued jersey, and resumed the pursuit.^[3]

I bought about 1 minute of time... ah, yup it's done, that was a complete fail.

Right then, I tripped on something and performed a grand fall. I fell head first into a bush almost my size, and made an annoyingly loud rustling noise. That

being said, the thicket did break my fall, so there wasn't much impact.

"U, kuu..."

With a pathetic groan, I unsteadily stand back up.

Despairing from the fear from the Armor Bear, I foolishly neglected to watch my step. I wonder if it's some tree root— as I was about to make sure, my breath caught.

"No way... dead..."

Right there, in a familiar uniformgakuran lay a classmate of mine.

My path had just now strayed a bit from the animal trail, and I tripped and fell because of this. Besides that point, the problem was that he doesn't look anything but dead.

He'd fallen face up and by his side was his bag and... as if he was just about to use the magic, a notebook with the magic circle page laid there open.

He's Takashima... Ah, I don't know the first name. I used to know all my classmates' names up till my middle school days, but since high school, I couldn't be bothered. I knew his face and surname, and never really had a conversation.

Still, he was in the same class 2-7 as me.

With the fallen Takashima-kun in front of me, forget first-aid and CPR, I didn't even do a pulse check.

I mean after all, his face is completely stuck dead stiff in an anguished expression. Eyes gaping open with traces of blood flowing out. In addition, mouth, nose and ears also had similar traces of blood.

It's not hard to tell he'd bled out from every known orifice on his head. And now the blood was in the process of hardening and becoming dark clumps.

Takashima-kun is dead, no doubt about that.

Why did he die, how did he die— I had no clue which one I wanted to know.

But in front of this corpse that suddenly appeared before me, I couldn't help but imagine it. That soon, I'd be like that too.

“C-calm down... relax... think, a way to not die... I can still survive!”

If I panic here, it's all over. Crying and begging won't do a thing, the Armor Bear will just follow its instincts and devour me.

Just, just a little more, there's still a little more time. I'll struggle and find a way to survive till the very bitter end.

I'm not hot-headed, nor am I a sore loser. And though I've lived with my fair share of compromises, I won't just give up on my own life!

“- Oh yeah, the lunch.”

With a jump, I moved my body, and reached for Takashima-kun's bag.

Please God, it's the plan I thought up really hard. Please, I beg you—

“Found it!”

Transparent tupperware in a plastic bag. That was Takashima-kun's lunchbox.

He was a big guy, I recall, a member of the baseball club and an athletic young man. His was not a normal lunchbox, but this large sized tupperware with food stuffed in, matching his build.

Half white rice with dried plums, and another half Salisbury steakhambaagu sauced with demi-glace and rolled omelettetamagoyaki. Finally, a bit of red leaf lettuce sunny lettuce and baby tomatoes placed as if an afterthought.

“It'll work, this can work!”

I made a silent thanks to Takashima-kun, or rather, his mom who made this lunch, and opened the lid.

In the same motion, I unzipped my bag at top speed, and evacuating everything inside, took up the desired item.

Of course, that is, the Red Shroom. Presently, it is the only thing that can deal damage to the Armor Bear, this poison item.

“Three in all... No, with this size, one could be the limit...”

The Red Shroom is around 10-ish centimeters~4 inches similar to the boxcutter. I thought about it for a couple seconds, and decided to use one and half of them.

Like when making stewnabe I cut them length-wise. For now, I put the julienned Red Shrooms, on the steak.

Next, I grab the rice. Yup, there's quite a bit. I can't hold it all in my hand, some of it falls on the ground. Well, it's fine, I don't have to be elegant here.

That's right, I'm about to make riceballs.onigiri Seasoned in Red Shrooms, poison riceballs.

Since the Red Shroom should work on the Armor Bear, it wouldn't attempt to eat it. It'll probably use smell or something to avoid it.

Thus, the plan is to mix them with the richly fragrant sauce and steak, and furthermore, use a white rice coating to give it an inconspicuous visual camouflage.

No idea if it'll work. But, at this point, I have nothing else but to bet on this plan.

It's probably been less than three minutes. Just then, the bushes behind me shook with a rustle.

It was no illusion, the large mass of gray had once again, slowly appeared before me. With great force, my body once again goes into a shiver.

Similar to when I dropped my lunch box a little while ago, this time, the riceball in my hand fell on the ground.

But that's fine. This poison mushroom riceball is already complete. I'd suddenly dropped it, but the plan was to run anyway. In fact, doing it naturally like this would likely invite less suspicion too.

Now, the game begins.

"C'mon..."

With a small mutter, I tightly shoulder my bag and move my legs. Facing the Armor Bear, I slowly retreat. Like before, so as not to aggravate it, and certainly not showing my back and dashing off.

The Armor Bear, just like with my own lunch, started sniffing out the riceball and the overturned tupperware beside it.

Its long red tongue licks the sauce sticking to the tupperware. *Dumbass, not that, can't see the better looking main dish over there?*

"Eat it... eat iit..."

And, *GaaAAA!* the Armor Bear raised a grizzly roar. Large fangs the size of human fingers are revealed inside the mouth.

"Uwa, I'm sorry!"

I'd loudly apologized by reflex but, just then, the Armor Bear'd eaten it in a single bite.

The riceball. Mixed with Red Shrooms, the poisonous riceball!

As I rejoiced, the Armor Bear made a gulping noise and swallowed.

And, as if not having had enough, it turned its sharp eyes at me, and slowly started closing in.

"Eh, huh, did it not...work...?"

There's no change in the Armor Bear. With its usual snort, it again took a step with its four thick, stout legs.

Y-you mean, the Red Shroom isn't immediate effect!?

It's not really impossible if I think about it. In thrillers, you often find scenes where they die in pain right as the poison touches their mouth, but there's no guarantee all poisons will work like that. Delayed effect, as in, taking effect after a few days, or a few weeks, that pattern is entirely possible.

Rather than weeks, if that Red Shroom doesn't work in the next few minutes, I won't be working either, because of that still unsatisfied bear.

Ah, damn it all, my head so full of just getting it to eat the thing, I hadn't considered the acuteness of the poison at all. Even the Intuition Pharmacy is just a "*Somehow known*" thing, it doesn't provide that much info.

"I, I'm done for..."

I was about to give up. But then, the Armor Bear's legs stopped abruptly.

GAA! it raises a sharp roar, and stood up on 2 legs and— then fell over right there.

It also started struggling with ragged breath.

“I-it worked! It fucking worked!”

The poison taking a toll on its body was obvious from the sight.

The Armor Bear’s writhing became increasingly fierce. Every time that mouth bears its fangs in pained groans, endless amounts of drool is scattered. The recklessly flailing arms dig into the muddy ground, and leave claw marks on the tree trunks.

However, its instinct for desiring prey yet remained, and it brought its eyes towards me. As if by its animalistic tenacity, the staggering Armor Bear used its four legs, and took a step.

Right now, I could turn around and get the hell out of here, but no, in the second step, it’ll catch me. I can still feel at least that much vigor from the Armor Bear.

“Shit, not enough damage! I don’t have-”

No, I do. If the Armor Bear’s feeling the scorching poison of the Red Shroom, and suffering from a rapidly rising fever, a way to worsen that condition is something I possess!

“Plunge into permanent swelter, and curse the body — “Red Fever”!”

The spell I shout out is the first Curse “Red Fever”.

This curse that instigates slight fever probably doesn’t have much effect on those with large bodies. But casting it on this guy who’ll go beyond the limit in a couple more degrees, may just push it over the deadlinethreshold.

Yet, the Armor Bear moves. A step. Distance to me: 3 meters.

“Plunge into permanent swelter, and curse the body — “Red Fever”!”

Another step. Distance: 2 meters.

“Plunge into, permanent swelter, and curse the body — “Red Fever”!”

Please die.

Yet another step. 1 meter.

Plunge, into permanent, swelter! and curse the body?!”

Just die please.

The Armor Bear’s steel arms, rise.

“RED FEVEEEEeeeeeeeeeeeeeeer!”

As a great impact forcefully brings down my body, I shout the Curse. The paw with shining nails was brought down.

Before I noticed, my eyes were seeing brown earth. I perhaps fell, or maybe tripped. No, more importantly– it’s hot.

“A-ahh...”

Belly, feels hot. Like burning... But it felt wet when I touched.

My right hand is dyed in blood. Ah, this is, my blood.

The Armor Bears blow had struck. It’s knife-like sharp nails had torn at my abdomen.

That implied, it must’ve activated. The second Curse, “Pain Return”.

“Ha, haha... I did it...”

Raising my line of sight a bit, there, lay on its back, was the Armor Bear, not moving an inch.

On the smooth abdomen of its dull gray shell, were 4 rough lines etched on, from the insides of which poured out copious amounts of blood.

Under unbearable temperatures, and having its belly shredded, finally, the armored monster died.

I finally did it. I beat it– Just as I realized that fact, as if break time was over, reality struck.

“A, AaAA...UAaAAAAA!”

Scorching pain running through the abdomen. And the image of life itself materializing and flowing out as blood. Right now, the reality of death was coming for me.

“L-like hell, I’ll die... here... No way, I’m dying...”

One more. Just one more time, work with me. Move, c'mon, MOVE, body!

With my all it moved, my bloody right hand. I reach desperately.

It's destination, my bag fallen right beside me. Fully opening it, I see the Red Shroom and— the bunch of Non-delions.

Non-delions, these have the hemostatic effect. I need to use them, here, now. I have to bet on that effect!

Grabbing a hold of the jagged leaves with my blood soaked hand, I somehow... some miraculous way, willed myself into lying face up.

As I properly look at the wound... Aa, I shouldn't have looked. It's so red everywhere, I have no idea what I'm seeing.

But I mustn't look away. With a shaky left hand, I undo the golden button of my uniform. Then, unbuttoning only the belly part of the dress shirt underneath, I forcefully raise the t-shirt under that.

Uwa, this is terrible... No, well, it's not like my guts are falling out, so it might be not too deep a wound. But still, if I leave this profuse bleeding alone, I'll definitely die.

"C'mon work... please just work..."

No wait, will just putting the leaves on there really work? Fuck, should've mashed it earlier— No, I can still make it.

"U, uu... Uu Eehh, so bitter..."

The Non-delion leaves I'd put in my mouth, tasted just like the dandelion leaves I once put in my mouth as a stupid kid. Bitter. Not edible at all, in fact, it's not even food.

Even so, wanting to raise the effect even a little bit, I bore the shitty leaf flavor and mashed them in my mouth, making it into a paste I can apply directly.

I had doubts whether this would really be more effective, but Intuition Pharmacy assured me that *"This is fine"*. Didn't think much of it when I discovered it, but this could've been a giftservice from Curse God Ruinhilde-sama.

“I-if I die now... I’ll curse...even God...”

And with the bitterness in my mouth, and the pain in my stomach, I got really sleepy... *Ah, so tired... can’t last, any...*

[1]Transfer Gate. Not sure what to say, it literally says ‘Heaven Sending Gate’. So name pending?

[2]Kuro no Maou Spoiler: At present, the translations are at ~320, in around 150 chapters, this Armor Bear appears. It’s a mob!

[3] RIP Jersey-chan ;_;

Chapter 4: Betrayal

“-Life is great”

I escaped the crisis of a lifetime.

No idea how long I was out. However, seeing as the Armor Bear’s corpse was still lying there, and as wild animals or other monsters haven’t appeared sniffing out the blood, I think it’s safe to say it hasn’t been that long since I lost consciousness.

The wound on my belly, for now the bleeding has stopped. My abdomen was black from all of the dried blood I had shed, but I could feel scabs from 4 large strokes. Seeing such big scabs on my own flesh really makes me shudder.

I remember hearing that bear nails are pretty bacteria infested, and rather than the flesh wound, the diseases they cause makes it especially nasty. It can’t possibly be that my own saliva, that I’d used when doing the mouth mashing, actually worked as a perfect disinfectant and anti-bacterial... No, no use worrying now. I’ll be ok, let’s just pray.

“Uu...a bit unsteady...”

Now then, I can’t bask in the joy of achievement forever. It’s too dangerous to stop here. Forget Armor Bears, even if it’s just some carnivorous animal, right now, I’m completely helpless.

But which way to go. No, I know the direction with the compass function, rather, how long till I get to that dungeon— “O-oh yeah, the dungeon!”

There’s the body of a classmate, *i.e.* Takashima-kun, here, implying, isn’t this the dungeon’s starting point? If it is, my hypothesis would be correct.

Though, every direction looks like the same forest scenery— Looking around a bit better, I notice a stone shrine just over there. The mossy surface covered in vines mixed well with the green of the forest and, though it was hard to notice, but once you do, it’s impossible not to.

Standing at 4 meters13ft tall, the oblong structure strongly asserted itself as something artificially built in the deep forest. This has to be the entrance to the

dungeon.

Even so, not noticing something like this, I must've been extremely preoccupied till just now. But I feel like I showed quite the quick-wittedness and swift action somehow defeating the Armor Bear.

Ooh, maybe I'm the type who's a straight up genius if I just make an effort?

I happily praised myself while heading to the dungeon shrine when— “-Oh man, The outside's really a friggin' forest.”

A familiar voice, I heard it. That was undoubtedly emitted from inside the shrine... Meaning, one of my classmates was about to appear.

“Heey! Anyone there!”

I don't care who. Having been here where there's *that* kind of monster lurking around, being able to meet an actual human being, there's no greater relief.

For now, let's be glad I can join up with a classmate.

“Ah? Momokawa? What, so you're still alive.”

From the other side of the dimmed shrine appeared, with brown hair and piercings, the class punk. Higuchi Kyouya.

“Eh, Momokawa-kun's there? wow, he is!”

Appearing next, the blond twintail loli, Reina A. Ayase.

“R-really! Kotarou!?”

And finally, appeared my chubby friend.

“Masaru!?”

“Oohh! Kotarou, you're safe!”

Saitou Masaru. The joy and relief from meeting this familiar chubbster, now tears really felt like gushing out.

Isn't that natural? This is more than just relief from meeting other people, they're reliable comrades who've been given powers of a vocation. If it's 3 people, chances are that there's a warrior or fire mage among them. It can't possibly be that there's more shamans in there.

Also, with some support my shamanic powers can also be made useful– “Oi, hold up, Momokawa.”

But then, my legs, that were rushing over in the overwhelming excitement, stopped. No, they were stopped.

By a knife that struck right in front of my feet. In barely another 3 cm¹ inch, these indoor shoes along with my toes would have been lopped off.

“Oi, what the fuck are you doing, Higuchi!?”

Masaru shouts out in place of me.

“Shut it, and add a –san ya fat fuck. Just shut ye’r trap and go pick up the core from that big one o’er there.”

“Kotarou’s been alive! We gotta help!-”

“Then you wanna die in his place, fagget?”^[1]

From a pocket in this trousers– I couldn’t really tell, Higuchi instantly took out a butterfly knife and stuck its sharp blade at Masaru’s throat.

“We got 3 people already, don’t ya fucking forget it.”

“H-hey guys hold on! Why are we fighting amongst each other! We need to work together and-”

“Ha! Momokawa, you l’il shit, ye’r head okay?”

He scoffed at my very reasonably shouted complaint.

“Didn’cha read the text message? Ya must be an absolute retard not ta notice.”

Yeah, don’t need this, he sneered, as Higuchi withdrew the knife from Masaru.

“Saitou, stop yer wankin’ and get that core r’now. I’ll take good care of Momokawa for ya. Ah, Reina-chan, you can wait inside, it’s gonna get a bit bloody.”

I have no idea what’s happening, but it’s painfully obvious how it’s not good. Then, the situation takes a turn for the worse.

Masaru turned dead pale, and following Higuchi’s order, began going towards

the Armor Bear.

And, as for Reina, she listened to his annoying nice-guy voice saying “*wait inside*”, and as if completely nonchalant about this clearly bizarre turn of events, retreated back into the shrine.

“So yea, Momokawa, sorry but die for me will ya. I’ll thank ya for takin’ out that big guy o’er there. Thanks for the loot.”

And with real murderous intent and a sinister grin, Higuchi came at me with his butterfly knife.

“Eh, no wait! WAIT, why’re you-”

“Oi, stay still. I’m trynna get yer vitals in the first shot, why’re *you* not lettin’ me show my kindness and put y’at peace?”

He said it as if messing around, but this was completely serious. I can just tell. Higuchi is really coming with the intention of stabbing me. No hesitance, no regrets, as if it’s natural.

In fact, his knife was already raised.

“Now, make it rain-”

“When you stab me, my shaman powers will kill you too!”

Higuchi’s hand, stops.

“Don’t be a smartass, pipsqueak”

Well, then why’d you stop. Higuchi is clearly wary now. Right, this guy must know too, how absolutely bizarre the powers of a vocation can be.

“I can return any and all damage back to my attacker. That’s my power.”

“*Shing*, he folded in the butterfly knife with a high-pitched sound. With the blade inside, the fist holding the handle-”

Exploded on my face. It hurt, no rather, I’m more shocked at what happened.

“-Hk! Fuck. god fuck!”

I see Higuchi with the same knuckle marks on his face as me. Wonderful, with ‘Pain Return’, even a weak beta like me won’t lose out when I’m hit.

Fortunately, my nose or front teeth didn't break. Instead, I did feel blood flowing out of my nose. No problem, I don't even need any Non-delionsfalse dandelions for this.

"H-hey, Higuchi-san, Kotarou's"

"Shut it lard! Just get the damn core!"

Perhaps because I hadn't been killed, Masaru made a relieved face.

But, my *friend* who, not only made no attempt to stop Higuchi's attempted murder, but was still listening to him, earned quite a bit of my displeasure and distrust. *Higuchi-san*, the fuck man. Masaru's out, can't depend on him.

"Higuchi, what's this core, explain."

"Momokawa, don't fucking test me-"

"You get what my power is right? You stab, and you die!"

Higuchi was so mad, seemed like his veins would pop. But, looks like he wasn't stupid enough to use his knife in a fit of rage. I'm glad I don't have to face the worst bad end of dying along with this asshole.

"Tch, fine, I'll tell you."

After a few seconds of silence, Higuchi spoke up. His words seemed like those of a loser, but for some reason, as if his sourness abated, he sneered at me again.

I have the worst feeling, but I'll listen to what he has to say.

"It's the item needed to activate the 'Transfer Gate', the core. You grab it from monsters like that dead one over there. it's in their corpse."

Looking to my side, Masaru's been poking around the Armor Bears body with a knife in hand. That knife was different from Higuchi's butterfly knife, a strangely old-fashioned design. Oh right, the knife Higuchi threw was also like that... I wonder if they got it inside the dungeon.

Nevertheless, there's no way you can break the Armor Bear's hard shell with a simple knife like that. Masaru probably figured that too. Giving up on breaking the shell, he resolved himself to get smeared in blood and fats, and shoved his

hand into the wound.

Can you really retrieve the core like that— I was thinking when, “Nice! Found it!”

Apparently he did retrieve it. On his right hand soaked in blood, was a dazzling red jewel.

“So that’s, the core...”

“Not bad, it’s got a big body, and a big core to boot!”

From Higuchi’s broad grinned statement, I learn that there’s a size distinction in the cores you can get from monsters. This core think is probably crystallized energy like mana or something. If there’s magic, there’s bound to be some form of energy or mana that enables its usage.

Therefore, these transfer gates that warp you to other places must need an adequate amount of mana to run. If not, it’s like a car with no gas in the tank.

“I beat the Armor Bear, so that core’s mine.”

A reasonable claim. The core’s an indispensable key item to escaping this place, I have not a bit of intention to hand it to Higuchi.

“Oi Saitou, pack up, we’re heading back into the dungeon.”

Forget listening, Higuchi’s straight out ignoring me.

Masaru follows his orders, and comes up beside Higuchi, core in hand. He met my glance for an instant, and awkwardly looked away.

Silently, he hands Higuchi the red core.

“D-don’t mess with me!”

“What, Momokawa, ye sayin’ y’can take this core from me, li’l shit?

With a devilish grin, Higuchi replies. Flaunting the bloody core at me.

Shit... this bastard found out I don’t have offense skills.

“Yer’a shaman? It’s the one that kills people right? Ey Momokawa, ye’r mad right? ye’r a geekotaku who thinks I’m some shitty DQNpunk right? right, then do it. Use ye’r shaman magic ‘n curse me to death!”

His eyes are assured that I can't. In fact, I can't. I don't have a comeback.

"Hyahahaha! See? ya can't do it, fagget! The fuck's a shaman, some shitty vocation that's what. Y'prolly killed that big'un just by chance right?"

You're half right, and half wrong you fucking DQN.

"I'll take this core, 'n y'll watch. Don't pull nothin, we got three people— Ah, right, riiight, wow, why din't I notice something this easy before."

So stupid, with a forced sigh, the highly-waxed-up-brown-haired Higuchi says. He must've thought up something awful no doubt.

"Saitou, beat Momokawa's shit in for a bit."

The worst option. 'Pain Return' reflects back damage to the attacker only. Higuchi won't even feel a scratch if Masaru's the one hitting me.

"Eh, I, uh..."

"Do it. And don't fuckin' stop till he cries. Where's that line from? Whate'r, you like that shit right?"

Masaru's frozen. But not forever. He was just hesitating, if Higuchi says it he'll do it. He'll beat me up. Without fail.

"Masaru... you being threatened by Higuchi?"

"I'm sorry... Kotarou."

I knew without him saying. Masaru's weaker than Higuchi. Even in a normal fight, though not as tall as Tendou-kun, he can't win against Higuchi who's pretty tall himself. Not even with his dual wielding sword style.

And, even now, after receiving his vocation, he can't.

Higuchi had come stabbing at me without an ounce of hesitation. He's probably killed someone already. He's used to it. He's completely ready to murder.

With their life on the line, people will do anything. No questions asked. It's obvious, I'd likely be the same.

I do get it— but,

“Dammit... even a friend...”

Accepting it? no way. No way I won't resent him when I'm betrayed.

“Kotarooooou, sorry!”

It hurt. His fist hurt more than the Armor Bear's strike, more than Higuchi's, much more. It caved in my cheek, along with my heart.

Straddling the fallen-down me, Masaru strikes me many, many times.

“Sorry...sorry...”

Tears come out. Mine and his too. Obviously, both of us are equally getting our faces punched in. His mounting me is of no relation.

The right cheek swells. The left one too. Nose also bleed. Both of us are a pulp.

“Ah right, I kinda forgot to say, the transfer gate here won't take more than 3 people it seems.”

In the middle of the pain and humiliation, the last question is answered.

Ah, I see, only three people can be saved. So the 4th person, me, they can't. And they won't.

“If you weren't some shitty shaman, but something like a healer, I'd've already left this useless lard and made you a pal.”

haha, Masaru, you're a sacrificial pawn see. Why are you still hitting me? Get mad. C'mon, show even a bit of manly pride, and attack that Higuchi like you're gonna die!

With the irreparable crack forming in our friendship, my heart doesn't yell anything but curses.

“Hey, aren't you glad Saitou, your good pal got a shitty vocation. *Thanks to Kotarou-kun being a shaman, I wasn't discarded by Higuchi-samaa*, aren't you thinking that while hittin' away. Man, you really got a great friend there. Might be jealous.”

Shit, shit, shiiiit!

I'll curse you, curse you, I'll definitely curse you to death! Higuchi, you, I

absolutely WILL fucking CURSE you to HELL?!

“Huff....haf...h-Higuchi-san... I can’t...”

“Gyahahaha! Man, y’ve sure become handsome, Saitou!”

Higuchi points and laughs at his swollen face. Goddamit, my face must be like that too right now...

“P-pl,ease...”

“Yea yeah, I get it. Can’t really kill him now, whatever then.”

Even Masaru wouldn’t sacrifice his life to kill me. Haha, if he was that obedient a slave, it’d really be super convenient.

I leered at Masaru with disdain, as he dismounted me. You’re heavy, fatass. I’ll be cursing you right after Higuchi.

“Seeya Momokawa, till we meet again, I’ll think up something to kill ya. Not that I’d mind if y’get eaten by some monster– *ptui*.”

Finally, after spitting on my face, Higuchi went back into the dungeon.

Shit, dammit... Pain Return won’t return simple discomfort.

“Definitely... curse, you...”

I could talk all I want. But right now, I can only shed tears of bitterness while seeing the two of them leave.

The worst kind of bastard, and the traitorous friend.

I’ll never forgive them—

[1]He doesn’t actually say fagget, just says “Aaa?” in an intimidating way like delinquents do. I just wanted to make it a bit more localized from my sparse knowledge from “”“movies”””.

Chapter 5: Souma Yuuto

My name is Souma Yuuto. Just a normal highschooler you can find anywhere.

After the 3 day holiday, though I felt a little lazy, I opted to attend school, chatted about dumb things with buddies in the morning, and then spent the rest of the day in boring classes— or was supposed to.

Sigh, how'd this even happen...

I open my eyes to find, not the familiar classroom, but an ancient-looking stone room. No windows, it's like a cellar, and there're white panels on the ceiling that shone like a fluorescent light, brightening up every corner of the room.

This stone room has nothing that stands out. Like a temple hall.

With a school bag on my right hand, and a sword bag with a shinaipractice sword and bokutouwooden sword each, I'm here standing alone.^[1]

"It's really, another world huh..."

With absolutely no warning, I, no all of us from Shiramine Academy class 2–7, were summoned to this world. It's pretty absurd, but I can't just avert my eyes from this situation where we've been transported to this totally unrealistic place.

Classroom suddenly sunk in darkness. The announcement from the mysterious man. Magic circle shining on the blackboard. If that was all, I could've still believed there was some sort of attraction or trick to it all, but before coming to this stone room the last thing I saw... The classroom run over in jet-black cracks, breaking apart into the abyss. If I see a scene like that, any normal common sense falls apart. I'm forced to believe that I'd been involved in the events of a world of magic.

Damn, this isn't a joke. Seriously, why'd this even.

"No, worrying won't help anyone."

Don't falter. Just, face forward and keep moving.

One of jii-san's granpa's teachings. Never thought that preachy-ass phrase would be useful at a time like this.

Right, first, calm down, then decide what to do. Though I say that, it's infinitely obvious what that is.

"Gotta find Sakura, my friends, everyone."

If that man can be believed, everyone must've been thrown into this dungeon. We may all be separated right now, but we'll definitely meet again.

In any whichever case, nothing's gonna start unless we proceed through the dungeon. There's no use staying in this empty, desolate room forever.

"Ah, right, there's that... magic formation and incantation, was it?"

A necessary power to capture the dungeon. That's how it was explained.

At that time I'd told everyone to get them down in our notebooks, but honestly, I thought it was pretty shady myself. Even so, I had a feeling it could be even a bit useful, and told my piece.

And now that I've been thrown into this dungeon, in this room, my feeling seems to have been right.

Still, will it really, will this magic circle and spell really work? And then, will it really be enough power to protect us? Actually, could it be that there's a huge catch— finding that out won't be after actually using them.

"...Alright, here we go."

My Campus notebook with the magic circle is already open, and the incantation is completely memorized.^[2]

Now I just have to—

The sudden scream interrupts the magic ritual. There's no helping it.

Because the high-pitch scream that reached my ears, I would, at least / would, never mistake it.

"Sakura, is that you."

That voice unmistakably belonged to Sakura.

Sakura was different from Reina, and wouldn't raise a cry for just anything. She'd stand firm even when facing the punks from Kuro high, not to mention crying out would be out of the equation.^[3]

That Sakura's actually screaming means she must be in fear and in pretty big danger.

I've got to go help.

Before I even made the decision, I'd already grabbed my sword bag and ran out.

"Sakura! Where are you!"

Having burst off running from the stone room, I arrive at a similarly stone-built dim passage. I must've ran around 50 meters55 yards. And then I came to a fork in the road.

"...This way"

I desperately recalled the scream, and estimated the apparent direction of the voice. Not calming myself in the slightest, I ran straight into the path I chose.

"-Sakura!"

And she was, in fact, there.

Long black hair with a sailor uniform, it was exactly the familiar figure of my little sister. However, her face was pale with a fear I'd never seen in her before, white as if all the blood had been drawn out.

"N-nii-san!"^[4]

"Are you ok, Sakura!"

Having unthinkingly rushed to Sakura's side, I finally recognize the situation we're in.

First, this place is completely different from the stony area from before. It's an expansive domed space, thick in greenery like a botanical garden. I'd think I had actually wound up in a forest if I didn't see the white panels of light on the ceiling above.

And, as if it was the lord of this forest, *that* was standing there.

“What the hell is that... a bear?”

From its outline, there's no doubt it's a bear. To boot, standing on two legs, it far surpasses my height, rising to almost 4 meters13 feet tall.

In the past, jii-san had called it training, and taken me deep into the mountain where we encountered a wild bear... But this guy's so big, the one from before seems like a cub.

“Nii-san, this is definitely a monster.”

She's trembling a little, but Sakura's words are very reasonable. It's obvious that this guy is completely different from an Earth bear.

As this bear was adorned in dulled steel, it was wearing armor.

In reality, it should be a shell. The spikes on the surface, and membrane covering the joints, reminded you of crabs or lobster. But looking at its girth and massive-ness, it's likely not something you could easily snap off with your hands. It wouldn't be strange for that to be like genuine steel armour.

“I'll distract it. And you-”

“No! Running away, leaving nii-san behind, I won't do it!”

Sakura's arms cling to me extremely tight. As if saying, they'll absolutely never let go.

“You're so caring, Sakura, but... I can't accept that request.”

I absolutely can't. I must protect my sister, protect Sakura.

“You can't win with this kind of monster, even if it's you nii-san!”

“It's okay. I probably can't win but, if you can somehow run-”

“Even if I run... if nii-san's not there, there's no meaning...”

Come on, why are you being this stubborn, Sakura. Regardless of this great crisis, I'm half amazed, and the other half, pretty happy.

“Don't worry. I don't feel like dying here either. I'll make sure both of us get out of this.”

It could become a lie. I'm satisfied being able to put my life at risk to protect Sakura, but I have no intention pointlessly dying here.

In the first place, even if she gets away from here, Sakura's safety isn't guaranteed. From now on, we must proceed through this dungeon infested with monsters like that.

"Trust me. Sakura, and everyone else, we'll definitely make it back home."

With resolve, I take out the bokutou from the sword bag. The shinai along with the bag, I drop, they'll get in the way.

As if sensing my will to fight, the bear, who'd been keeping its distance and just watching, sluggishly dropped its forelegs onto the ground, and on that 4 legged posture, raised a sharp roar.

"Now, get away quick, Sakura!"

"... Okay. Sorry, nii-san."

Leaving me that in a practically crying voice, Sakura finally started running. I don't turn back to see her off.

"Kept you waiting, monster."

Garuru! With a growl truly suitable for a beast, the great bear glared at me with its two red eyes. The fight's already started.

It's not my first fight with literally no prospects of winning. Neither is it my first fight risking my life.

But, as for a fight with no hope of winning *and* with my life on the line, this'd be the first.

Scared. But I don't waver. I'd learned how to suppress my fear long ago.

Don't like it. But I won't run away. I know without being taught that I have things to protect.

So, I'll fight. Even if it's a monster, I'll fight without fear.

"Fu, haa..."

I further calm myself with a deep breath. Focus the mind.

The weapon in my hands, a simple bokutou. Just the other day, I bought it brand new at the arms shop.

Its clean and sturdy, but lacks the power to kill. I could kill someone if I hit a them on the head at full power, but this bear covered in a full body armor-shell seems like it won't even take a scratch no matter where I hit.

Honestly, even a real katana likely won't do a thing to this guy. Well... jii-san might be able to cut through iron... but that aside, I'm not as strong as jii-san, the bokutou doesn't come into the equation.

So the actions I can take in this situation are naturally limited. In the end, I need to focus on and go for its weak points. In other words, the eyes.

Obviously, when doing kendo, eyes are forbidden. Other martial arts equally ban targeting eyes. So in normal cases, we don't practice thrusting at the eyes, nor are we made to.

But it wasn't the case for me. Not that I wanted to, but certainly, jii-san did teach me eye-lunges.

I mean really, teaching a small kid such a dangerous forbidden technique, for a guardian, for a teacher, I think there's something wrong but... I'll honestly thank him because it gave me even the slightest chance to get past this crisis.

Gripping the bokutou with both hands, I bring it level with my shoulders. An amateur could tell I was aiming for a thrust, but for an animal, no, monster, it doesn't matter. There's no need to play mind games with it. Just strike with the smallest distance in the fastest time.

Finally, as the bear sloppily moved its thick legs aiming for the prey known as me— *Now!*

The fastest, and also most powerful swing in my whole life till now. It was that much of a satisfactory strike, I could boast with confidence.

As if being sucked in, the bokutou I accelerated at incredible speeds pierced the bear's eye!

"Goaaaaaaa!"

Just as I hear the piercing roar, I managed to pull away the sword for dear life.

That was close. The moment its eye was struck, the bear reflexively mowed its foreleg at me. If I was distracted being too happy about getting a hit in, that log-like arm with its spikes would've blown me away. Furthermore, if I was a moment late in drawing away the sword, the sharp knife-like nails on its paws would've torn me to shreds.

"Huff...huf..."

After that series of maneuvers, I was sweating hard, and heard my heart beating like a drum.

"Please, let it just leave now."

When we met that bear in the mountain forest, taking a hit from jii-san on its snout, the bear disheartenedly withdrew. Jii-san always said, wild animals are surprisingly cowardly. They supposedly flee at the slightest smell of danger, so would another world's monsters too—

"Guoo, GAAAAaa!"

Even with its right eye crushed, the bear glared at me with its other eye as if it was my sworn enemy. Seems like monsters prioritize anger for their foe rather than safety.

"Shit, that wasn't enough?"

Crushing both eyes. It's risky, but no other option.

Fortunately, the bokutou didn't break, neither had I let it go. I can certainly attack again.

In front of this raging, savage bear rushing at me, I again take my stance, aiming for the eye.

Getting a hit last time was pretty much half coincidence.

It may sound obvious, but its eyes are small. If I were to target them, I'd need incredible control. I'm pretty confident in my swordplay, but it's not like I can hit bull's eye 100% of the time.

But right now, I have to act fast. The bear's already close. It'll get into my range in another step. I don't have any time, place, or leeway to waver.

My sword splits the air with great vigor. Similar to, no, I understood that it was with a speed greater than last time.

And then, aiming for that approaching bear, that fierce burning crimson left eye, the blade strikes. True in it's aim, for the second time, my blade pierces—

No way, it blocked!?

Just, how... the answer, I'd already just seen.

I definitely saw the bokutou's tip precisely hit the remaining left eye. But at the critical moment, it closed its eye.

Yes, same as it's body, its steel shelled eyelids.

Faced with eyelids of steel, the simple bokutou lost all piercing potential, and was tragically deflected.

Then, my body becoming completely immobile from my attack returned by this unexpected defense, I showed a fatal gap.

“GuwaAAAaa!”

Following which, an intense shock ran throughout my whole body.

I suddenly recall, I think it was last year, when I was attacked by some punks from Kuro high on their bikes. At that time, one of them was so mad, he really tried to crush me under his tires.

Back then, just as I was run over, I swerved away enough, and though it looked like I was blown away, there wasn't much damage. I even had the strength to finish off that punk who'd fallen over.

“Gu, uu, aaa...”

But at present, I didn't have the leeway of time I had then. The spiky shell practically made its whole body a weapon. Also, if you look at its size, it's clearly much heavier than that bike. No way I'll be ok. It's a miracle I'm still alive.

With my somewhat disordered head, and blurry vision, I somehow or other, raise my face to look forward.

It seems, I am lying face down. There's not much pain fortunately. But, I may have been paralyzed.

“God, damn... it, gonna end... like this...”

The inescapable feeling of *‘Death’*.

I don’t have any strength left to fight. Oh yeah, the bokutou’s also gone off somewhere. Though, even with a sword, I couldn’t stand up at all in this state.

Ah, it’s over. When it blocked its other eye, my chances of victory were completely gone.

I, lost. And naturally, I know the end waiting for those losing to monster’s like that. As according to survival of the fittest, I’d be devoured.

However, after a glance, the bear turned away from me as if losing interest. No, that’s not it, it didn’t merely look away.

That’s right, it was staring towards the direction Sakura had run off. That is, it turned towards the stone pathway I’d first come from.

“W, ait...”

Sakura’s in danger.

If you think about it, the bear’s thought process is very reasonable. Me who’s practically dead, it can leave behind without worry. It could come back after finishing off Sakura, and I’d still be here.

“Wait a sec...”

Raising my voice as if squeezing it out, the inside of my mouth fills with the taste of blood.

Though I throw desperate pleas at it, a monster who doesn’t understand human words would never stop. Lumbering away with its steel body, the bear continues the hunt with nothing in its way.

Its right eye’s been crushed, but the left one’s ok. At the very least, it won’t have any trouble chasing after and catching Sakura.

Then, no matter how much more experienced in martial arts Sakura is from ordinary girls, unarmed, she naturally won’t be able to handle this bear. In the event that she’s caught, there’s zero possibility of being saved.

“S-Sakura...”

Will I die? I, and then Sakura too. Will I, without having protected Sakura, die?

“I will...protect...”

That’s right, I’ll protect Sakura. I must protect her no matter what.

Because I’m the brother. I’ll protect my sister. Naturally.

Thus, I swore upon that very obvious premise. That I’d definitely protect Sakura.

“I....will...”

I remember it. That determination, even after 10 years, hasn’t faded a bit. The hot, sweltering emotions in my heart, move my body.^[5]

“U, o, o... Oo”

Slowly, I put my right hand, left hand, onto the ground. I feel the texture of the earth on my palms. Alright, nerves aren’t fried yet.

I can move. Then, I can stand.

“O OOOooh!”

Stand. Pushing my arms, slowly, with both legs. I, stand.

OK, I’m up. Now, let’s do thi—

“Gu, ha...aa...”

That, was my limit.

Hot lumps rise from the pit of my stomach, and forcefully opening my throat, exits from my mouth. It was deep, red blood.

After which, ignoring every speck of my will, my body stops. As if, the fresh blood I spat out just now, was all the energy left in my body.

Never to take a step again. I sank onto the ground, only watching the bear’s back getting farther and farther away.

Can’t even shout. I have no feeling in my limbs. This time really, I can’t feel anything.

But, my emotions alone, won’t ever settle down.

Please, move. Move dammit. Just for a minute, no, even 30 seconds will do. I can still catch it. I can still break its left eye, and Sakura will be saved. So, come on. Just this last time, let me protect Sakura...

As I was sinking into the quagmire of despair, I suddenly heard a voice.^[6]

No, it's not in my head. This voice, this mysterious voice... a woman's voice with an exquisitely beautiful tone, was calling out to me.

"Arise, oh chosen Son of Light."

What was that? Light? Me?

"Presently, this world is again to be plunged into a sinister darkness."

I don't get it. Light and darkness, and the world, I don't get it at all.

"Cleanse that darkness, and pierce that evil."

Don't care. I just. Want to protect Sakura.

"Mayst thou bring light to this world and become — the 'Hero'."

Just then, certainly, the world filled with light.

"-UoOOOOOoooooooo!"

When I noticed, I was already standing.

The feeling is back in my limbs, no, actually, they feel much more powerful than usual. My body was in tip-top condition as if the desperation from just before was just some lie.

"Uohh, Wha— What is this!?"

Something's glowing. Something, or rather, it's my body that's glowing. Apparently, filling the world with light meant I myself would be lit up.

Looking more carefully, it isn't my body that's alit, but something like a white mist, no, an aura was being released like steam, and enveloping my whole body.

"Is this, the power of a 'Hero'..."

That woman's voice I heard on the verge of death. It was like a decree from God herself.

Normally, I'd have ignored it as some auditory hallucination, but my body, which had critical injuries, had instantly been healed. Moreover, this brilliant white aura was clearly a manifestation of some supernatural power.

"God, huh."

Speaking of which, that incantation did say something about borrowing the powers of God. Perhaps, in this other world, something like God really does exist, and can save people.

"No, more importantly—"

Right, I can't waste time thinking this and that.

If I can have power, I don't care if it's from God, or some random coincidence. I'll gladly make good use of it.

Yes, with this power I can—

"Protect Sakura!"

The legs I bolted off from were surprisingly light. My body swiftly advanced, or rather, it felt like I was moving as if falling from a cliff. Though I say that, much unlike when falling, I also felt like I had absolute control over every part of my body.

Right now, I've become unbelievably strong.

I can clearly tell, probably because, I was already able to grasp the level of my strength. You can't tell your limits with just club activities at school, but I, having high risk matches with jii-san every day, had begun to see it.

So I know. Right now I've reached heights I could never, no, not just me, I've reached heights mankind can't ever hope to.

"oOOOoo!!"

Moving with an inexhaustible supply of power exuding from my body, I catch up to the bear in no time at all.

Were it by hearing my cry, or by some instinct understanding that some power appeared that could even blow away itself, the bear's reaction was quick. It swiftly turned its head, bracing that large body with unbelievable

agility.

Before I noticed, it'd already stood its 4 meter body on two legs, and gotten into a stance to smash me with its steel arms.

It wouldn't be an attack that I, not even the bokutou at hand, could do anything about. No dodging, no preventing, and I certainly wasn't in a spot to counter it.

But right now, strangely, I didn't feel like losing. I'll win, definitely.

With utmost confidence, I raise up my arms. As if I was holding an actual sword— nay, at this time, there was certainly a 'sword' in my grasp.

“‘Cross Calib’ Sacred sword of Lightuuuuuuuuuuuuur”^[7]

A gushing white flash. From the eye of this storm of blinding light, I could clearly see the scene in front of me.

It was a sword of light. In my hands, was a brilliant sword of white light.

This sword I swung down with great strength, easily cut down the giant steel body.

Just like the *hero anime* I used to watch as a kid, the divine light was overwhelming and made quick work of the terrible monster.

The steel shell, cut away as if it was just for show, I cut through the insides of its huge body like water. But, there in fact was the resistance of it being cut.

The sword of light I'd swung, thus cut the bear monster in two.

“...Go o.”

Eyes wide open, the bear leaves that slight death throe and then— that large body disappears.

From head to tail, it wasn't gushing out blood and entrails, but was being enveloped in pure white light. After that, the light instantly covered up the swaying corpse, and before the body hit the ground, it all burst into particles of light.

As I was dumbfoundedly staring at this strange body disappearance phenomenon, the light particles suddenly rushed towards me as if being sucked

in.

I shout on reflex, and move my arms to drive them away— Ah, seems like, the light sword's already gone. While I was thinking such, my useless resistance came to an end.

As of now, the light particles have all neatly disappeared as if absorbed into my body.

“Wh-what was that...”

Anyway, there's no problem with my body. It wasn't even like the light was hot to the touch.

Or rather, now that I take a good look, my body's unscathed, and the enemy bear's also disappeared, the whole thing feels like some bad dream.

Man, that sure was something,- is what I'd think if I woke up right now in my own bed, but where I am hasn't changed, it's still the forested dome, and the tearing from when the bear tackled me still remains on my uniformgakuran. So there's no mistake that the battle from just now, did happen. I was critically injured, revived thanks to God's miracle, then used the sword of light to finish off the bear.

Yup, alright. I can't agree with most of it, but I do get that it's happened.

Now then, I don't have time to idle here. Now that the threat is gone, I need to find Sakura—

“N-nii-san...”

“Sakura!? Why're you-!”

As I turn towards that timid voice, right at the mouth of the stone passage, was the peeking face of my sister.

“Can't be, you came back to help me?”

“Yes, my ‘Vocation’ was— Ah, nii-san!”

What a stupid thing to, or so I was about to get angry when, huh, what, my strength, it's...

“Nii-san! Are you alright!”

“Oh, yeah... Sakura, I’m pretty much, ok...”

I feel like I blanked out for a bit. In fact, I have a gap in memory of when exactly I’d fallen to the ground, and raised up in Sakura’s embrace like right now.

This is pretty serious. My body is assaulted with an exhaustion like when right after training in a scorching hot day. Being pretty much ok was just something like acting tough in the spur of the moment.

Nope, I’m gonna pass out.

“C’mon... don’t cry, Sakura...”

Finally, wiping away the large drops of tears from those round eyes, I let go of my consciousness.

Ahh, when I wake up, please let me be back in the real world. Please, God. I didn’t want to be the ‘Hero’. So please just get me back to my peaceful, everyday highschooler life—

Name. Souma Yuuto.^[8]

Vocation. ‘Hero’.

Inherent Skills:

1st: ‘Cross Calibur’ Sacred Sword of Light

Learned Skills:

‘High Walk’

Acquired Skills:

‘Force Boost’

‘Iron Guard’

‘Tri-Slash’

I saw a dream where I was forced to memorize some things I don’t really understand... I think.

^[1]I’m gonna be using the jap names from now on for these swords. It flows much nicer. See more info about them [here](#).

[2]Campus, it's a brand.

[3]Kuro/Black highschool, was mentioned in the prologue.

[4]As I said in chapter 1, I'll use 'nii-san' and not 'brother'.

[5]Refers to some harem-MC-like backstory probably.

[6]Quagmire of despair, purely google translate genius~ Speaking of quagmire, I'll take this chance to recommend Mushoku Tensei. Some people pretty much hate it, but I don't.

[7]It's Cross Calibur. He's just shouting it out.

[8]Name, it actually says 'Holy' name, I think this applies for everyone.
pending.

Chapter 6: Fairy Square

I keep descending on the long, long spiral stairway. It feels as if I'm falling towards the bottom of hell. Well, I myself am not in an uppity mood at all though.

"I won't catch up to them, will I..."

A while after the Higuchi party disappeared into the shrine, I also decided to head into the dungeon. While waiting, as I was going crazy with rage and vexation, there was also the fear of monsters coming from the smell of blood. All in all, my heart was a mess.

To distract myself from the distress, I thought to do some preparation for here on out, and went scavenging through the dead Takashima-kun's belongings. He was in the baseball club so, I'd have been glad if he had a metal bat or something, but the only useful things on him were some CalorieMates, a bottle of Pocari Sweat, and very deep in the pocket, a lighter. Of course, I found some cigarettes there as well. Since I prefer not to, those would be useless for me, but I decided to keep them anyway.^[1]

After stuffing the notable items into my bag for a while, and then getting up to head in, my head had become much clearer. Calming down after stealing from the dead, I must've already become *some* kind of crazy.

I then stepped foot into the shrine cum entrance to the dungeon. And there I found that previously mentioned helical staircase that I'd begun descending. Nothing else to note, there were only those flights of stairs in there.

Wide enough to fit two adults side by side, the inner side of the spiral was a pillar without any blemishes. Made of stone like the outer wall of the shrine, the well placed blocks didn't wear any moss or vines nor did it suffer any corrosion, it was quite the sight.

Parts of the wall dully emitted white light, which made seeing easier. It was surprisingly easy to find where to place my feet, and my descent was without trouble.

Speaking of stairs, I wonder why Higuchi climbed up this place. The destination should be the transfer gate deep inside the dungeon. With the notebook's compass function, they shouldn't have gotten lost. I can't think of why he'd want to come outside. Considering how long these stairs are, you wouldn't want to just climb it without any objective— No, right, I see, he *did* have an objective. He wanted to get his hands on the core from the Armor Bear I defeated.

Of course, it's not as if he witnessed the moment the Armor Bear collapsed. Which implies that he has some ability to detect dead monster or maybe cores. If I think about what kind of vocation it'd be... something in the Thief or Scout genre I guess. At the very least, he doesn't give me a Warrior or Fire Mage kind of feel.

So then, one of those three must be a thief— Ah, thief huh, that fits Higuchi like a fucking glove. He was born for the job. That adept usage of the butterfly knife too could be an effect of thievery skills. And when you say thief, of course their weapon of choice is the knife.

Still, those guys really seemed used to everything didn't they. It's not even been half a day since I've arrived in this world. Nonetheless, Higuchi already has the gut to kill people nonchalantly, and even Masaru buried his arm into the Armor Bear's insides without flinching.

It's not like they just up and decided to be like that because the situation called for it. Most likely, the two of them have already done it enough to warrant that kind of attitude.

“What if, the timeframe we arrived at is different?”

That seems like a reasonable conjecture. Those guys had started their dungeon life some number of days ago. And as for me, I was finally dropped into that forest today.

I had reluctantly exited the classroom first, but ended up here last. Or perhaps, there's some of us who haven't made it here yet.

Either way, the fact is that I had a late start compared to that fucking DQN bastard. That guy's probably already killed people and had experience fighting monsters. And, as per the explanation, he's probably leveled up on his vocation

skills too.

Can I really start grinding and catch up with my already weak shamanism... No, let's not think about that now. I want to take my revenge on Higuchi and Masaru, but I lack the power to carry it out right now.

First things first, I gotta think about how to survive solo in my first dungeon.

"Huff... It finally ended."

In the middle of my endless speculations, I reach the end of the spiral. The place I arrived at was very open, and much brighter than the stairway.

"It's more like a park than a dungeon."

It was around the size of a neighbourhood children's park. Plentiful verdant greenery with flowers of red, yellow, blue scattered. Unlike the forest I was in recently, the trees and shrubs are much more orderly. Of course, it doesn't go far as having proper flowerbeds, but the grass was cut neat like at the national stadium.

I can see the ceiling, but It doesn't give the closed-off-ness of being indoors. The same light from the stairway shone from 5 meters16.5 feet above, gently illuminating the space.

What's most striking would be the stone fountain plonked right in the middle of the room. It was small and circular, but the reliefs of flowers in bloom surrounded by butterflies all around gave it an elaborate finish.

Its most distinctive feature would be the statue of a fairy standing boldly at the center. Long, narrow, leaf-like wings on a long haired young girl in a one-piece. And the face, super cute. This doesn't bring anything but the image of fairies to mind. This little girl sized fairy statue stood atop the shaft which acted as the water spout.

"Yup, this must be the 'Fairy Square'"

No, that's not some name I went and made up. Fairy Square is the official name stated in the newly updated information in the good ol' notebook.

I'd checked the notebook inside the shrine right before coming down the stairs. It seemed to have updated while I was having my dance of death with

the Armor Bear, and the info supports Higuchi's explanation.

Like how the transfer gate needed quite a bit of cores to activate. Like how only, exactly three people can use that gate to escape from this dungeon.

Why the hell didn't you, even if forcefully, add something this important to the first message! so I was getting mad, but there's no one here to vent it on, so I buried it back in my heart and kept reading the rest.

And one of those currently confirmable pieces of dungeon info is, this 'Fairy Square'.

It says that, in these ancient ruins there are many fountains with fairy statues laid out, which, for some reason, monsters won't approach, making them the sole safe areas in the dungeon.

Endlessly flowing for many thousands of years, the fountain's water was clear like spring water, and made for an important source for resupply. In addition, the fruit from the trees here can serve as food, and the flowers can work as medicinal herbs even if applied raw.

All in all, it's a resting area. One could even say, a Save Point. It kinda even feels like that cute fairy is saving my progress here.

No well, I don't really have the guts to attempt dying once to try for a load game though.

"Since I'm here and all, let's take a break."

Or rather, I should call it preparation for solo challenging the dungeon from now on. Even before fighting monsters, there's survival tactics to consider.

That in mind, let's collect some water.

"Woah, looks really — cold!?"

The clear water surface that I dipped my hand into without much thought, felt cold enough for me to let out a yelp. It was in fact surprisingly cold.

"... it's good."

As I try drinking it, that reaction naturally flows out. To be honest, I've never thought about water as good or bad tasting till now.

Whether it be mineral water or spring water, it all felt the same— But, this water is clearly, good. Really delicious. Almost makes you think there's something weird in there.

“I wonder if, this is recovering mana...”

Puha~ I let out a sound of satisfaction like what my father does from a beer after the bath. It feels like that blue MP gauge placed below the green HP gauge is being vigorously filled up. Though I have no idea whether that's actually happening or not. It's my own body, but I'm not sure.

For now, like it said in the info, seems like there's no problem using the water. At worst, it'd be fine to come back here to resupply. Now to just hope the structure here makes it possible to return.

“These tree nuts, you can definitely eat them, but I wonder about the taste...”

The next thing I grabbed was, *Filled with nutrition, with just this and water, you can survive no problem!*— the nut praised by my Intuition Pharmacy as such, AKA the ‘Fairy Walnut’. That'd be its officially designated name from the notebook.

The walnuts are fallen under trees which line up on both sides of this avenue-like room. They're slightly smaller than baseballs, and have a brilliant shade of green. *These ain't ripe at all!?*— is not what I complain about. Peeling off this green husk, you can find that characteristic walnut brown color inside.

“And these leaves, they've got a bit of healing effect.”

As if imitating the wings of a fairy, these walnuts have two pairs of thin leaves loosely stuck to it. Intuition Pharmacy says that these 4 leaves can work to accelerate the healing of wounds. If mixed with the Fake-elionfalse dandelion it would make for an even better healing concoction.

“Hm, the taste is so-so.”

I took a bite of the fairy walnut while thinking up drug creation plans, and the taste wasn't too good or too bad. It's nothing special.

Well, it's obvious cause there's no seasoning, but, just being edible raw gets it a passing grade as food. The look and edibility are the same as Earth walnuts, a

familiar wrinkly shape, so I don't feel weirded out by it.

"But I don't really want to eat just this you know."

Spoken like a true privileged modern Japanese citizen, I diligently put away the *main dish* from here on out into my bag.

"Alright, now to get my shaman fingers crackin'"

Lastly, I face towards the garden of flowers in full bloom as if inviting me to it. The notebook's already declared that they have 'medicinal uses', so these will become raw materials for making some valuable drugs.

The text message info only talked about one type of these medicinal herbs. It gave some official name, but it's too long and I forgot. Looks exactly like a 4-leaf clover, so that's what I'll call it. My other classmates are probably calling it that too.

Incidentally, this 4 leafed clover is similar to its counterpart on Earth in that it's a pretty rare find. However, the value in effort of finding one is returned with similar, no, much more value in powerful healing effect.

The Higuchi gang has already passed through this fairy square, and probably took most of them. There's no use in looking for possible leftovers.

But as a shaman, I'm able to discover useful herbs other than the clover we were all informed of. Moreover, I could even combine these herbs using Intuition Pharmacy, and make nice meds.

I was scared that it'd be like RPG consumables, and only individually usable—but that turned out to be needless anxiety.

"Hell yes, this'll do it... this'll work!"

Woohoo!- I dive into the flower garden. The hidden effects of all these different flowers sizzle into my brain.

The one's that look like white lilyshirayuri have a healing promotion effect like the fairy walnut leaves.

The one like a red tulip warms you up, blue lavenders are detox, yellow for pain relief— There were many different types as if someone'd gathered them.

“Awesome, now to roll up my sleeves and get cooking!”

Seems like my run hasn't completely run out after all. Finally, I'm starting to see the light.

Author's Q&A: Act.2

The first arc of my new series is finally done. Those who are reading, thank you very much. Those who have yet to, please do, it's only just started.

Since the first arc is done, I think I'll talk about a lot.

Now then, if you've read the first arc, you should have a rough understanding of what this story is about. Now, for the protagonist. Momokawa Kotarou possesses this vague power of a 'Shaman', and traverses the dungeon with lots of pain and suffering. But never giving up, he moves forward... filling the main criteria of a protagonist. As for the readers, I'd be glad if you could watch over Kotarou's growth, and cheer him on as he's working hard.

Well, as an author, I feel that Kotarou shines the brightest when he's suffering in a crisis though.

I'd already mentioned the direction this work is going towards in my last activity report. There's a lot of class transfer stories, but they mostly seem to have a protag with a cheat power... I didn't want to do that. I want to make it a dark and gritty story with a 'battle royale' feel.^[1]

Kurono from 'Kuro no Maou' had more of a Power Ranger/Kamen Rider like modified super human, strong from the start kind of feel I guess. Meanwhile, other than his shaman powers, Kotarou is still an ordinary human. He can't rely on his powers.

Because the protag is so weak, I hope to draw out a different enjoyment and battles than what you get in 'Kuro no Maou'. Kurono's life could be described as a heroic epic, but Kotarou right now has only just put his feet on the ground, in a Survival + Battle Royale thing and just staying alive takes his everything. Through Kotarou, what I hope to do is express a realistic kind of fear and anxiety.

Well, from the comments I've received, there's been many questions, so I'll try to answer them within the acceptable range. That, and I'll be revealing some minor spoilers.

Q. Isn't the girls' seat numbers strange? There's a gap.

A. In my highschool, the girls started at No.31. Eh, is it different nowadays!?

Currently, this has been the most asked question. From the end of the boys to the start of the girls, there's a gap in seat numbers. That's not a mistake, I did it intentionally. Taking my own highschool as a reference, I went and confirmed if that was the case at present, and after that, started the girls off from No.31. It's most likely my school that does seat numbers differently.

Q. Relight-kun, what is even?^[2]

A. It's fine, no problem... I hope.

His first name is, of course, inspired from the protagonist of the famous 'Death Note'. It's written with the kanji for moon(月) and pronounced Light, but will that get into any copyright problems? I personally think that changing the whole name, and just somewhat borrowing the pronunciation should be still in the safezone. Of course, Hayama Relight-kun doesn't hold a death note or see Shinigamigrim reapers, and isn't aiming to be God of the new world either. If anything, this name would give the impact and impression of those alleged DQNspunks.

Just, if there's any problems, I'll change the name. Retcon it like it never happened.

Q. Can you not beat Higuchi with 'Pain Return' and 'Red Fever'?

A. Not possible.

At this time, it'd be over with a straight punch in the gut by Higuchi. With the weakling Kotarou, that one punch will make him spill the contents of his stomach, and he'll collapse. Higuchi'll get damaged back too, but he can somehow handle it. 'Red Fever' also has only a slight fever effect, and he'd only be able to afford one hit with that after getting close.

So something like using 'Pain Return's' reflected damage, in addition to 'Red Fever's' stacking damage to win with a long term battle... that kind of RPG-like strategy won't work.

Even if Higuchi was a normal kid, this result wouldn't change, and even if

Kotarou could time-leap back and do it over and over again, he'd never win.^[3]

In the story, it's obvious that Higuchi's already got his vocation, so it's even more hopeless.

Unfortunately, 'Pain Return' won't become a cheat power. As Higuchi's already noticed, there are work arounds and weaknesses. It's an annoying power to fight if you don't know about it, but not something you can't counter. Being able to bear one of your own punches, may not seem like much, but with a weak boy like Kotarou, it's more than enough of a tactic.

'Red Fever' is even more out there. I'm sure everyone's experienced the slight fever before. Indeed, there's a headache, and you feel lethargic, it's hard... But, you wouldn't just skip school or work because of just that. In the end, you only have to put in a bit more effort to go about your daily life. Even more so in a deadly battle, you wouldn't care about some fever at all, and work hard to not die.

Q. Is stacking 'Red Fever' useful?

In the Armor Bear fight, Kotarou did keep recasting 'Red Fever', but that was only because, he had nothing else he could do. It was a series of actions made under great fear and tension. There's absolutely no effect of stacking recasts to increase the fever.

If I had to say, it'd be with instant fever recovery powers. If the opponent has that kind of power, he could recast and maintain a fever state.

Only, it went just as Kotarou expected, and the Armor Bear was defeated too, this 'induce a slight fever' effect doesn't forcefully bring body heat to slight fever level, but has the addition-only effect of raising normal body temperature to slight fever.

Meaning, you can just, *Oh, my friend has a strong fever so I'll just make a slight fever!* do that kind of recovery effect... It really is that useless.

Q. Why so many Archery clubbers?

A. There's some who joined chasing after Souma Sakura, so it seems like a lot. There're also the normal archery enthusiast members in there, so as a result, class 2-7s distribution of Archery club members are somewhat high.

Q. The Armor Bear also appeared in Kuro no Maou right?

A. In Arc 25, 'False Days', when Sarel was in Lily's hut alone, the monster that came attacking and got a beat down was, in fact, the Armor Bear.

I'd written the script for 'The Shaman can't become a Hero' first, so technically, 'Kuro no Maou' got it from there. It's strength would be the same in both works. The Armor Bear was beat by a single shot from an amputated Sarel, but it's a pretty tough monster. It'd be a rank 3 monster in the 'Kuro no Maou' verse, a fatal opponent for a newbie party, and pretty tough for a solo veteran adventurer too. It doesn't have any magic or breath attacks, it's just as it looks, a large body with lots of strength. Possessing an armor-like shell which has magic blocking effects, it's a straight forward power oriented monster.

Q. The MC having a girly face is a bit...

A. Sorry, it's a matter of taste.

For me, Kotarou, with his personality and internal monologues, having a normal not-very-noticable boy's face, is a no-go. He has a (somewhat) trap-ish face, and I'm aiming for a protagonist's charm in a different direction from that of Kurono's.^[4]

Indeed, with a trapotokonoko protag, you'd want to pamper him a lot. Well, I mean, that's fine right? They're always cute, and good boys too. They've been depicted as such quite a bit, and you could even call it the correct, classic, proper way to do it.

But, I think that, as he's not some pretty girl, but biologically, undeniably male, the trap protag should need to suffer more, and face bad situations. That cute face and strong heart, it was good to have them beaten up at least once in the story! If you want to just pamper and treat him like a princess, it'd be easier to just make it a girl.

I believe that a legitimate trap protagonist needs to have an appearance rivalling a pretty girl, as well as a man's heart that faces adversity. It *is* however, a personal opinion, and I won't say it has to be like that always.

That should be all for now.

The first arc had some cruel happenstances, but next comes the dungeon

capture from the very bottom, please look forward to it.

[1] Last activity report, I'll get to it eventually...

[2] Oops, in *light* of this answer, I'll change Rewrite to Relight. Which would be once. In the attendance record. My bad.

[3] Re: Zero jab? anyway, re: zero is pretty awesome. Arc 4 translations are going well too~

[4] Coz Kurono's manly af.

Act 2: Pig

Chapter 7: First time Spelunking

“A-ah... I’m sorry, please don’t do anything painful, please.”

Right now, I’m in full blown begging-for-my-life mode. I hope you don’t see this as shameful though.

“Momokawa Kotarou. To have met again, we are thus glad.”

I face the Grim Reapershinigami, or rather, the God who bestowed me with the oh-so-wonderful vocation of shaman, Curse God Ruinhilde. A skeleton body similar to the one you could find in the biology lab, he unleashes a fierce, indomitable presence.

Not only is that skull face in the worn out black robe super scary, I also had painful experiences with him like having my head messed with and chest pierced. So, obviously, with no half-baked-ness, I’d up and start begging for mercy.

“Umm... Have I perhaps, done something wrong?”

Please spare me from unfair scoldings like, *Pathetic, to be done in by some DQN despite being a shaman*. As I can’t really reply to a literal God with, *Then why don’t you just give me some super strong Curse to make Higuchi suffer and die, huh*.

Thine grudge, it doth taste rather sweet, we praise thou.

It seems he’s not angry for that event, but rather seems happy. *Whew*, I’m relieved from the bottom of my heart. I can’t even imagine what this God’d do to me if I made him mad.

“Yes, it was my pleasure. Then, why have I been called here, if I may inquire?”^[1]

I’d suddenly woken up, to find myself in this God’s space. Though in pitch darkness, strangely, you can see each other and the surroundings. Like outer

space scenes in Sci-Fi movies.

I was in the fairy square, testing out various mixtures of herbs, but seems like my fatigue had built up and I'd dozed off.

That's a safe area not approached by any monsters, so sleeping there wouldn't be a problem. I hope nothing attacks my immobile, defenseless body lying there on the flower garden. No, not in the sexual meaning, the predatory one.

"We shalt grant thee, a novel Curse."

"Eh!? You will! Thankyou very much!"

An unexpected level-up. I guess the beating the Armor Bear must have gotten me a heap of exp. I mean, that thing has to be at least mid-boss tier. If you got that guy as you first encounter in a game, that would be a game-breaking bug.

Whatever it is, if I can get a new move, I'll thankfully accept. If possible, something that can directly damage monsters. Please, God.

"Recieveth it well."

With such majestic phrasing, Ruinhilde's arm moves. Um, feel like I've seen this bef— when that bad feeling had raced through my body, the bony right hand was already gripping my head. More specifically, it was gripping my slightly long black hair.

"U uwaAAa! Again— gUFuoAAAAa!?"

While I was crying out, he had spear handed me right in the middle of the belly. My hard-abs-less squishy abdomen offered not the slightest resistance, and let the sharp fingertips pass through all too easily.

"Begrudge, envy, but stops not thine legs. Indeed, doth thou possess the aptness of a Shaman. We expect much, young devotee, Momokawa Kotarou."

Ruinhilde was rattling his skull face saying something, but I didn't have a moment, even a speck of time to listen to God's words. Actually, my consciousness is already... Ah, damn, what is this nightmare...

"Alright, got myself a new blessing, made lots of meds too, time to head out!"

I'd received the blessing like one of those splatter films, and was a bit depressed, so tried to get myself riled up even if forcefully. I mean, if I don't then I'd never have the guts to step into that dark passage AKA 'underground labyrinth dungeon'.

"H-headin' oouuut..."

In the end, with terrified-witless steps, I really began my dungeon spelunking.

The thin rubber soles of my indoor shoes clearly transmitted the feeling of stone underfoot. The fairy square seemed like a neatly cut off nature park, right after which, the passage was made in stone only, like the stairway.

However, those gray walls were rough, covered in mosses, and had large cracks running along them. Breaking through the gaps in the stone, unknown weeds sprouted everywhere.

Intuition Pharmacy was like, "*Weeds with no effect at all. Worthless. They should just go extinct.*", and dishing out some sick burns-cum-explanations in my head. Was it always this kind of power?^[2]

Though these weeds were growing so happily, there's no mistaking that this place was deep underground where the sun's light doesn't reach.

The light here, is of course that same magic white light. However, the space between these luminescent magic tiles was sparse, and the light didn't reach each and every corner of the of the passage. From the edges of areas shrouded in darkness, I felt like I saw some big bugs crawling about.

"Ha,ahaha... no way, can't be a cockro-"

Another rustle as I swallow my breath. The shadow reflected in my vision for an instant, looked nothing but like that reddish brown *thing* that's hated unilaterally all across Japan.

I'm not that bad with insects, and won't hesitate to smash *that* with a rolled up newspaper. Nevertheless, if it gets to palm sized, it's no good. Something, many things are no good. That's not something humans can handle. We'll go into decline.

Shivering in such thoughts, I just quickly keep walking through the passage

without checking left, right or back. Fortunately, I stopped hearing any of the creepy noises *that* makes. *Fuu~* as I breath a sincere sigh of relief, my feet stop.

“Fork in the road... no, looks like a main road.”

At the end of the passage, appeared a large open area. On the ceiling high up, I see the large type luminescent tiles which light up the present scenery. And also, paths that could hold 2 lanes of cars, splitting in front of me.

“Kinda, looks like long tunnels.”

Though their semi-circular ceilings were orange in color though, there isn't a sodium bulb in sight. Looking left or right, the road, slightly curves until it melds into the darkness. It felt like a subway train could come out from there any second.

“I'll go... right.”

I'd opened the magic notebook to check the compass. The arrow on the dimly glowing white magic circle did in fact indicate towards the right-hand-side road. Not shaking or wavering, pointed stiff.

I, having nothing else to rely on, kept on walking where the arrow so confidently indicated with no particular doubts.

“This thing, isn't broken or anything, right?”

When it isn't changing at all thirty minutes into walking in the tunnel, naturally, those kinds of doubts would surface. Every time I check the notebook, the arrow's still just pointing forward.

I needlessly doubt it for a few more dozens of minutes. The arrow shifts direction.

“Uaa... is this was really ok?”

The arrow pointed straight at the back of a wall that was crumbling, revealing a narrow passage. Without a doubt, that doesn't look like it was made along with this tunnel, but by someone else who drilled a hole to the other side.

Along the way here, I'd seen similar places with the wall crumbled, but if you tell me to go into one, I'd be a little hesitant.

Well, no use worrying. *This must work as a shortcut*, with such positive thoughts, I slide myself into the large crack in the wall.

And inside, there was a passage just like the one I entered in from, from the fairy square. So similar, I was beginning to doubt, this dungeon consisted of only these tunnel and dim passage type paths.

For now, without expecting any spectacular fantasy-esque scenery, I started walking on when,

“-Dagoaa!”

I heard a voice.

“Who’s... no, not a person...”

At first, I thought it could be a classmate shouting. But, that voice didn’t sound Japanese at all, it was a jarring cry impossible to comprehend. Could be someone from this world speaking its language, but the roughness of it, could be some beast as well.

“...looks like it’s from that room.”

The voice had come from a door midway through this straight passage. Seemed like the inside of the room was brighter than in here, and white light was seeping in through the slightly opened door. It was just the right gap to peek through.

This could even be a new monster following the Armor Bear. If it finds me, I have no countermeasures at all. The new Curse I got from Curse God Ruinhilde is, unfortunately, not the offensive kind.

Though I feared it dangerous, that didn’t stop me from checking what lay inside that room. I got curious, I got super curious about it. Really, if there’s a new monster, I at least want to confirm what it looks like. I could get some valuable insights too.

Feeling my rapidly rising heartbeat, I kill the sound of my footsteps, and stealthily approach the door. The indecipherable cry reaching my ears get progressively louder. I get the image of that wood-like door being kicked open and the owner of that cry jumping out, in my head, as I finally reach the door.

I hold my breath, and slowly, peer into the gap—

Not a shout, not a sound of surprise. That I didn't do either of those could be said to be nothing but miraculous. Because, what I saw beyond the door, broke past my imagination.

"They're eating... human..."

I only said that in my head. Eating human flesh. If I had to say it in words, those would match what I was seeing.

It was a stone room with no peculiar features. The size would be about half of a class room. Diagonally at the edge of the room from the door I was peeking from, were 3 shadows.

No, those were really only black in color. Those bodies glistening black under the white light as if smeared in oil, gave me the same aversion as when I saw those cockroaches. But they, standing on two legs, holding things with their two hands, wearing worn and torn clothing, seemed much closer to humans than any roach.

Nevertheless, no one has to convince me that those 3 black things are not human at all. Eating a person, with just that one point, I refuse to acknowledge them as human.

"huff... huf.... What the hell, is that monster..."

At the back of the room, those three are gathered around something— no, I already recognized what that was. Lying there was unmistakably, a girl from my class. In the middle of that red-black pool of blood, I spotted the familiar deep-blue sailor uniform. From that pleated skirt, the legs peeking out shone strangely white.

Though I could see so clearly, I didn't know that girl's name. Because I can't see her face. From my position I could only see the back of the head, with black shoulder length hair— just the back of the head, disconnected to the body, rolling on the floor.

To add, it was not only her head, but both arms were missing from her body too. Right arm from the shoulder, and left, from the elbow, had been cut away.

Grunch, grunch, resounds the vulgar sound of mastication. The missing arms were each in the possession of one of the black ones who were in the middle of gnawing at those white slender fingertips.

“Ugh...uu...”

The contents of my stomach were flowing back up, but I managed to swallow it down. I wonder if I got some resistance from watching all those zombie flicks with Masaru that had nothing but the gore going for them.

Still, no masterpiece of horror filmography can hope to accomplish what this undoubtedly real scene presented in cruelty, frustration, discomfort, disgust... ah, I feel sick, so sick... a feeling, nothing but, sick.

I look at the black thing's face as it chews the middle finger of the right hand. A face uglier than even zombies.

Its piercing round, yellow eyeballs stand out from the pitch-black skin. Though they seem to glitter in the light, it's unlike the shine of gold, but rather like the yolk of a rotten egg.

Its nose at the center of its face was short as if smashed in. Maybe human meat is just that good, or perhaps is it eating a girl that got them excited, I don't even want to know. But seeing that rough breathing through its nostrils, it sure gave that kind of impression.

Most of all, its mouth, wholeheartedly indulging in the white finger with no thought of wiping off the dripping blood, gave me the worst disgust. A big mouth deviating from the meaning of that expression. Its mouth stretched up to the middle of its cheeks. From that large oral cavity peeked out white and yellow filthy, uneven teeth, and a strangely long red tongue. Its teeth tore away at the finger meat, like a leech, not spilling a single drop of blood, then licking the meatless finger bones.

It's unbearable to look at, but those two eating just the hands were still better. Much better than the other one. Lifting up the hem of the sailor uniform, it was excitedly shoving its face into the slender, white, naked belly underneath. Shoved it right in the middle where you'd find the navel. It was slurping out her intestines from there and devouring them. Even though it had its two hands, it still ate like a stray dog eating from a trash can. Despite it's

human form, it's filthy dining wouldn't be seen in even monkeys.

"Huff... huff... g-gotta get out of-!?"

Suddenly, one of them raised a shrill cry. Throwing aside the half-eaten right arm, it grabbed the rusted axe hanging by its waist, and turned around. Yes, it turned around right towards the door I'm peeking from.

Crap, they found me—

"DegyeEEE!"

Or so I'd've thought, but it turned back round right there. Seems like, it *hadn't* actually noticed me.

The hell man, fuck you, scaring me like that. As I was cursing them in my heart,

Chok! a dull sound reverberated throughout the room. What is that— before I question the sound, that thing's action burns into my eyes.

It had swung down its axe at full power. Where? it's obvious. On her corpse. The target was the leg. At the base of the thigh.

Chok-chock, chek-chok. The sound of piercing meat repeats. I saw it madly striking repeatedly with the unsharpened, rusted blade. The part of the human body, next in thickness after the waist, was battered countless times by the unwieldy axe. Rather than being cleanly severed, it was raggedly being shaven into.

The girl's pale legs are drenched in blood and defiled in red cuts. The skirt, turned up from the violence, revealing a pair of prim light-blue underwear, only to be accentuated the graphicness of it all. I'd dream of staring at a girl's pantiespanties, but that thing's vigorous axe thrashing, made it completely into a nightmare.

Yes, a nightmare. Being attacked by the Armor Bear, having my core stolen by Higuchi. That misfortune felt oh so warm. Right now I felt like the luckiest person in the world. I mean, I'm here, alive, and she's there, dead, being eaten. In all vulgarity and sloppiness, by those ugly, barbaric monsters, devoured to bits.

Crkk, a different, larger sound reached my ears. It was undoubtedly the sound on the femur being forcefully split after half of it had been chopped through. Then, finally it grabbed the chopped off leg with both hands, and sank its filthy wide mouth into the meaty thigh in ecstasy.

I unwillingly hear it going *GueE* or *Buhe* as if it's satisfied with the dish it's gorging on.

"No... no... just, enough already..."

The two others, as if provoked by the one ravishing its leg, started wildly fighting over the half-eaten thigh in that one's hands. At that juncture, I'd had enough, and slowly backed away with my trembling feet.

That's enough insight. Much more than enough. I understand that this dungeon has demons that'll happily devour human flesh.

From their hairless, slimier than smooth, bald head, with two short protrusions like a deformed snail shell sticking out, I'd be right in calling them demons.

"I have to get out... absolutely, no matter what... from this hell"

With unabated fear rising from deep in my heart, I rapidly advance through the dark passage.

[1]He's super polite with kamisama.

[2]Intuition Pharmacy-chan confirmed for best girl :D

Chapter 8: Encounter part.1

“Yay! a fairy square!”

Seeing the only bright, peaceful place in this dark, gloomy dungeon I, like a rising high-school player reaching home base at Koushien, slid right into the room.^[1]

The fairy square gave me a feeling as if I'd returned back to where I left from. The neatly spaced trees of fairy walnut, the medicinal flower garden in full bloom. Finally, the save-point-like fountain with the cute fairy statue. Water, food, medicine, I could get them all right here.

But, what I needed the most was the sense of security of the fairy square, where monsters don't approach. Obviously, because I came to know, how that kind of violent, man-eating demon runs rampant in this dungeon.

Looking back, those things had clothing, and used weapons such as the axe. One could see an intelligence greater than monkeys but less than men. In RPG terms, they gave the image of Goblins or Ghouls. In a game they'd be beginner level mobs used for grinding exp, but seeing something like that in real life only gave me fear and panic. There's likely more of those than the three I saw. Implying, this dungeon, is literally teeming with them.

I should... just live here from now...

Like an office workersalaryman who'd just been laid off, I was sitting at the edge of the fountain, head down, mumbling these heart broken words. Rather than continuing this dangerous dungeon exploration, god knows when the next safe location will be, I ended up genuinely thinking I should just stay put here.

No, I get it. I know doing that isn't possible. But, at least, I can't really jump into that abyss right now—

“Nn... uu...”

I feel like I heard a groan. It's not a sound I myself leaked out along with some auspicious sigh.

“Hu-Who's there!?”

My first reaction was wary. I won't be smiling like an idiot when meeting a classmate anymore. It got a bit hazy because of that gory scene from before, but Higuchi's loathsome grin instantly flashes back into mind.

Only three can escape from here. Having been betrayed by my best friend, I know there won't be anyone capricious enough to let me in their group, if only to make up numbers. To add, my vocation is that of shaman. You can't rely on me in fights either.

"I... know you're there, show yourself."

With my shaky hands, I take out my boxcutter and fully unretracted, and repeat the Curse incantations in my head countless times. With 'Red Fever' and my newly received Curse, I should be able to hold them off somewhat. It's better than doing nothing, is my general feeling.

"Come out dammit!"

My already shrill voice, becoming even more soprano from the tenseness, echoes pitifully in the fairy square— but, the other party hasn't made a single reply.

If they're hiding, I'll just have to find them. That being said, I already know what places a person could hide in this room.

I glance at the trees lined up on both sides of the room but, nope, you can't completely hide yourself behind those. I don't see anyone there.

That being the case, there's only one more place. That is, right behind the fountain I'm standing in front of. If you lie sprawled out on the opposite side, you'd be completely out of my visual range.

I prepare myself, and sneakily begin tip-toeing around the fountain. Only the splashing sounds of flowing water hits my ears. The moment of truth, to be revealed in a matter of seconds. It's a small fountain in the first place, walking slowly, a round-trip wouldn't even take 30 seconds. Even less time if the distance is halved.

Indeed, it was a classmate. Like the one I peeked at through that door just before, dressed in the same sailor uniform, a girl from class, lay there collapsed.

However, the impression was completely different. Compared to the unknown girl from before, the one in front of me right now lying pale was practically twice her size. The girl boasting such a large figure, there could only be but one.

“Futaba-san!”

Futaba Meiko. From the seat next to me, the big-bodied girl. But also someone whose body shook enough to not be able to draw the magic circle, a classically girlish, small-willed person. That girl, was lying there, paled blue.

I don’t have any particularly special feelings for her, and when I handed her a copy of the magic circle in the classroom this morning, it was nothing but a whimsical act of small kindness. Honestly, that much of a relationship isn’t enough to put my trust her. And right now, I need to be wary, first and foremost— but, I quickly ran over to her. Along with the boxcutter, I threw away my panic, wariness and steeled heart.

“Futaba-san, are you alright!”

Because she’d been injured. The first thing I notice is the redness of her abdomen under that blackened sailor uniform rolled up to the chest. The wound was, different from mine received from the Armor Bear, a straight slash across the belly, as if torn up with a knife.

The shirt was rolled up, not to invite men into attacking her, but to somehow treat the wound herself.

However, she didn’t have the means to carry out any treatment of such a terrible wound. And that would lead to her present state.

“Ah... Mo, mokawa... kun...”

She thinly opened her round eyes, and saw me, who was calling out to her, by her side. Traces of tears on the edges of those eyes. How long had she cried in fear of being so close to death. Now, she didn’t have the strength to even cry.

“Hold on, Futaba-san!”

“H... Help... me...”

“I will! I’ll help you right now!”

“Don’t... please don’t... leave me... behind”

Leaving that, Futaba-san’s eyelids were again, shut.

“Futaba-san!? Futaba-saaaan!”

No reply. No reply, but she’s still faintly breathing. I quickly decided to check her pulse. Reaching not for her wrist, but her pale neck. That was closer. As I touch, I’m surprised at the softness of a maiden’s skin. Soft, white skin. But fat.

I’m damned tired of my male instincts rising first, but on my finger, I indeed feel her pulse.

Futaba Meiko, she’s not out of the game yet.

“Please... work!”

With a prayer, I turn over my bag where I’d put the medicine I, as an amateur shaman, earnestly made at the first fairy square.

Fak-elionfalse dandelion and fairy walnut leaves ground together with the flowers that looked like white lily, I grab first grab the medicine named ‘Ointment A’. Of course, there’s a B and C made with other combinations of herbs. But, right now I don’t give a damn.

Ointment A was stored in the tupperware from Takashima-kun’s lunchbox that’d saved my life. And now it would be saving Futaba-san’s life too, this miracle tupperware.

“Aa, umm, before applying I have to disinfect... no, don’t have any disinfectant... no, no before that, I need to wash the wound itself, ah, I need to wash my hands too!?”

Paramedics would cry seeing this disorganized excuse for first aid.

First of all, I washed my hands in the fountain, grabbed the plastic bottle out of the contents of my upturned bag, and quickly twisted the cap. This was something I was carrying, the one half filled with an energy drink. By the first fairy square I’d already emptied it, and filled it with the water from the fountain. In the end, I hadn’t drunk a drop till reaching here, so it’s filled to the very brim.

“E-excuse me...”

After apologizing for some reason, I reached my hand towards Futaba-san's plump belly. It didn't look erotic as it was covered in blood, but when touching, I felt an enticing warm softness from it. Bearing the urge to vigorously rub it, I used the water from the plastic bottle to rinse the wound, carefully so as not to widen the cut.

Though the blood was somewhat washed off, since some time has passed since the injury, some of the blood had hardened. At this rate, I wouldn't make any progress. After making the area clean enough, it was finally time for ointment A.

Fortunately, the cut wasn't deep enough that her guts would pop out. However, the horizontally running slash right below the navel was still bleeding out bit by bit. Death from blood loss would be the highest risk factor.

"It's ok... this should, this will work..."

I'd survived with the slight haemostasis-only effect of the fak-elion. This now greatly upgraded version, ointment A, will definitely make quick work of a smallfry wound like this. Believing that with my all, I grab some of the pasty, wild-grass-scented ointment from the tupperware, and smear it on Futaba-san's belly.

This should definitely stop the blood flowing out, but if it should have the opposite effect... No, let's not, I can't just worry about everything. Though I think that, when I see Futaba-san's blood-drained pale face, the word 'too late' inevitably comes to mind.

"Now... I can only pray, huh."

Using up half of the contents from the tupperware, I had nothing else. I had neither bandages, nor blood transfusion packs. To boot, there was no clean bed to quietly rest her on either. It's unfortunate, but she'd have to keep lying on the grass here.

"If this doesn't work... maybe I'll get cursed by Futaba-san..."

Chapter 9: Encounter part.2

Finishing up Futaba-san's emergency treatment, I decided to take a nap for the time being. Though it hadn't been long, quite a few things did happen, and I was genuinely fatigued. Just how many traumas does this day have in store for me? It's been one anxiety after another.

After that, not being aware how long, and not wanting to go to the trouble of restarting my powered down phone to check the time, I slept soundly till my body had its fill. It was on top of the grass but surprisingly comfortable. In addition, there wasn't an *ever-so-pleasant* dream with Curse God Ruinhilde making an appearance, so I'd woken up quite refreshed.

"Futaba-san... seems to be alright"

Her peaceful breathing reminded me of a Holstein taking a nap at a farm. No, not as in her boobs, but in the sense of her tranquil presence. The color in her face returned somewhat, she was resting calmly.

Nevertheless, her defenceless posture lying before me does in fact incite an urge to squeeze. We'll, there's no way a loser like me'll actually do anything. Well naturally, since I'm but a lowly virgin boy whose age equalled exactly the amount of time he hasn't been with a girlfriend.

"Sigh... I'll make more meds"

Since I'm still not feeling up to dungeon crawling, I started remixing more of Ointment A to replenish the portion used up.

To be honest, if you just knew the effect of the herbs with Intuition Pharmacy, you didn't need to be a shaman to actually make these ointments. There was no game-like convenience of casting some magic and getting the desired item. Basically, you had to collect the herbs and diligently grind them with your own two hands.

I work at the process single-mindedly, with the regular flow of water from the fountain as BGM. I take a branch from a Fairy Walnut tree as a pestle, and a convenience store plastic bag (small) I discovered deep in my bag, as a mortar,

finally throwing in a mix of ingredients eyeing out the amount of each.

We take leaves from the Fake-elionfalse dandelion, and Fairy Walnuts, but as for this white-lily-like flower— umm, let's just call them White Blooms— we need not the leaves nor the petals, but the nectar inside, which has medicinal effects. Since I don't have any way to properly wring out the honey, I can only tear off the petals and throw in the ones that seem to secrete nectar. I worried if this rough method would be effective, but Intuition Pharmacy whispered "It's fine, It's fine", in my head, so I decided that it was.^[1]

Anywho, in that manner, I had made more Ointment A, the thing that seemingly healed Futaba-san, proving its great efficacy. With this, there's much less danger from quite a few types of injury.

"Still... What do I do..."

It's not about the ointment, or about what I'd do with the dungeon, but on the subject of Futaba-san who I happened to have saved.

Now that I've calmed down, inevitably, doubts rise on whether this was the right thing to do. No, there's no guilt about the fact of saving her. At that moment, I hadn't for a single moment thought of abandoning her.

That would be because I am a person of great empathy and heart, which is not the case, but actually because I'd just seen such atrocious things done to another dead girl's corpse. I didn't want to see someone dying in front of me. There's not much other reason.

And it's fine that I saved her, but we now get to the primary problem, this unchanged situation akin to a battle royale. Though I've saved her life, there's no guarantee that Futaba-san will feel any gratitude towards me.

Although she was asking for help, she could have just been utterly despaired from this situation and desiring death. Or perhaps, she's like Higuchi, the type to kick down and use people. As the number of people who'd be able to escape, who'd survive, was clearly declared to be 3, there's no simple way of trusting anyone.

If that number had been 1, I'd currently be facing the even crueller internal debate of killing her or not. In that sense, the number of 3 is appreciable in that

one can have 2 other allies. There's a way to go in trusting people— but, as soon as the 4th person appears, someone must be cut off, it's a harsh, restrictive number.

“hmm...”

Honestly, I don't think I can get along well with Futaba-san under these complicated happenstances. Will we aim for escape together, or will we distrust and go our separate paths... No, me being a shaman, I need to bring Futaba-san to my side by any means.

No way to know what her vocation might be, but whatever it is, it'd certainly be better than acting as a lone shaman. Even if you take away the vocation, Futaba-san simply has more power than me. Her upper arm is as thick as my thigh, it's slightly tight in her sailor uniform. Extending from that pleated skirt, her thighs are each as wide as my waist. She's not only thick, but tall too. An overwhelming body difference. Minimum-class Momokawa vs. Heavy-class Futaba, I don't think it's hard to decide who to bet on.

“If it's Futaba-san, she may be able to bash in at least one of those demons. [2]”

I must get my hands on that power. If you think about Higuchi's 3 member party, the students I'd encounter from now on likely wouldn't be going solo. In fact, if I meet another 3 man team, at worst, they might actively try to kill me.

Furthermore, as a shaman who lacks any and all offensive ability, I'd hinder any party I'd have hopes of joining.

But with this Futaba-san here, her being alone, she's moreover someone I've saved. There's no greater a condition for inviting her to join me.

“Damn... that's just evil...”

Basically, I'm planning to make Futaba-san owe me. It's the best course of action. Me having a clear benefit, saving her was no longer an act of kindness.

Disgusted at my own self-centered cunning, just thinking of it, I'd hesitate in trying to draw her in, but ultimately, I'd do it. I'll paint over a filthy facade, concealing my avaricious intentions with a cool front.

haha, being all chummy without a speck of trust. I'd never party up with such scum.

"Nn... Uu nn..."

Just then, Futaba-san sluggishly stirred her body like a cow, letting out a strangely alluring voice. Her thigh-sized arm moved and her thick fingers rubbed around her eyes.

"Futaba-san... you woke up?"

Though I'd planned to forcefully drag her into my camp, I was unable to show a calm, refreshing smile, and ended up posing her that question with a strong, yet stiff feeling. Seems I haven't got an ounce of acting talent.

"Ah... Momokawa-kun"

Slowly raising her eyelids, she called my name with a similar slack.

"G-good morning"

"Yeah... good morning... good mor-eh, huh, Momokawa-kun?"

Her languished eyes shot open as she became aware of me.

"No way, Momokawa-kun, why are—"

"Stop, don't just get up yet!"

I panickedly stopped Futaba-san who had started to quickly raise herself, perhaps from the surprise of me being present. The wound on her belly hadn't completely closed off yet.

"Huh, but, I... umm..."

"It's okay, take it easy. I put some ointment on the wound on your belly, so please just rest for now—"

"Eh, my belly— Kya!"

Raising a truly feminine yelp, Futaba-san moved with unprecedented vitesse, and lowered the hem of her shirt. Seems exposing her barrel-like middle in front of a boy was quite the embarrassing situation.

"Ugh! Ouch!"

“Wha—, are you ok!? No, more importantly, the wound hasn’t closed so just don’t move!”

“Uu... S-sorry...”

Futaba-san apologizes teary-eyed. May be insensitive of me, but just now her expression seemed just like that of a chastised puppy, kinda cute. If that face wasn’t so round, she’d be no different from a pretty girl. Her eyes were large and round, and her face itself was quite well balanced in fact.

“Is it, bleeding?”

“No... it’s fine...”

For now, we had avoided the great disaster of the closed cut reopening.

“A, umm... Momokawa-kun, you saved me, right?”

Futaba-san asks with a timid feeling. Seeing the pure light in her eyes, my heart slightly jostles.

Prepare yourself, Momokawa Kotarou. This is the critical moment, you have to make her indebted to you and make her an ally, any means possible.

“Yeah, when I got here, I saw you collapsed. I quickly put on some ointment, and gave you first aid. I’m glad you’re ok.”

“Th-thankyou... truly, you’re really the one who saved me Momokawa-kun. I thought I’d been dreaming”

Apparently, her memory of when she said “Help me” vaguely remained. Nice, with this there’s no doubt that I’m the one who saved her.

“I, thought I was gonna die... So, so scared... But, I was so happy when Momokawa-kun came... So happy, you’d save someone like me again... Thankyou so much, Momokawa-kun, thankyou-u... uu...”

“Eh, please Futaba-san, don’t, cry so much...”

As if overcome by the great emotion of narrowly avoiding certain death, Futaba-san started crying unabashedly, so hard that it seemed talking further was impossible.

“Uuu, Momokawa-kun, thank you... weeeh!”

“I-it’s fine, no problem, you’re all good now, so relax—”

With this and that, for a while I was busy consoling the crying Futaba-san.

At some point, I found myself really irking the me thinking only about cleverly making this girl my ally.

At a scene like this, it would have looked much cooler if I concentrated solely on soothing her. But these idle thoughts kept popping up one after another, and I could give her words coated in sugar on the surface only.

“Sorry, Momokawa-kun. I’m, fine now.”

Nevertheless, with the solver of all things known as time, Futaba-san had come to relax. Now, it was finally time to have a real talk.

“So well, for now, can I get you to tell me how you got injured like this?”

Can’t rush things. First is to collect info. I have no idea why she was collapsed like that. I should get on with the main subject after knowing what happened to cause that.

“Aa, umm, I was... err...”

I had meant to ask the obvious first question, but Futaba-san’s expression began to cloud. What, was that the bad option?

Welp, gotta Quick Load and have another go now! My confused head could only output this kind of dumb thought.

“I, I was... uuu...”

As Futaba-san’s tears had reinvigorated their journey to the ground, I realized my complete lack of talent in giving proper counselling.

No, don’t give in. Even without talent, the conversation can’t progress without knowing her circumstances first. I have to get it out of her even if she’s crying.

“Calm down Futaba-san, it’s alright. First, from the beginning, right, please tell me, one by one, what happened after you left the classroom.”

“Uuo-okay...”

While sobbing relentlessly, Futaba-san gave me an affirmative nod. Alright,

seems like she'll talk.

“No need to hurry”

“Mm, Thanks Momokawa-kun... so you know, I—”

[1]As with Fake-elion, White Bloom is just my attempt of naming Momo-kun's pseudonyms in English; it can be also called, simply, white flower.

[2]Refers to the black ones from last chapter.

Chapter 10: Futaba Meiko part.1

Chaos swirled in the classroom that had begun its collapse. What Futaba Meiko remembered, was that mayhem and thinking, *Ah*, as she was thrown into the seemingly everlasting abyss of pitch black.

“N... uu...”

She awoke lying in a dark place. Cold, hard, and slightly wet too, there was nothing of greater discomfort. As she was recalling the soft, warm, fit-to-her-girth king-size bed in her room, her mind returned to reality.

Fortunately, she hadn't forgotten anything. After crying a bit from the anxiety of waking up in an unknown place, she was quickly able to grasp the current situation.

Apparently, they really had been brought to another world. She had been asleep inside a moss-covered small stone shrine-like building. A verdant forest peeking from the doorless, wide open entrance, opposite to which, there lay a spiral staircase running downwards.

Where should I go. Where'd everyone go. Again, the anxieties pinched at her large chest. As she was about to cry herself asunder for a second time, Meiko realized.

“Ah, right, the magic circle! From Momokawa-kun!”

Floating into her mind were, the bizarre patterns of white light on the blackboard, and the small boy with a cute-ish face sitting next her, her saviour.

The page with the drawing of his own work he had handed over so bluntly, it could be seen as some random scribbles, but right now, it was her only hope. *Thankyou Momokawa-kun*, saying as if praying to the LordBuddha, Meiko invoked the magic.

“Oh Gods above, grant us salvation with the force of thy miracles. For we shall adhere to thine decre— Kyaa!?”

As she had finished the recitation, a magic circle of light appeared on the back of her hand. Dazzling, and at the same time, an acute heat.

“Kyaa—! What the, a-ouch, burning!”

In truth, the degree of heat wasn't so high as to warrant such a reaction, but the abnormality in her own body made Meiko yelp, made her cry out.

Though her shrill voice echoed annoyingly loud inside that small shrine, just then, she heard a voice.

“—shall we bestow.”

Not her own. Undoubtedly, it was the voice of a third party. It rang clearly inside her head, dispelling any doubts if it was her imagination.

“To thee, great power shall we bestow.”^[1]

It was a gentle female voice. Her mind, rattled with fear and anxiety, strangely came at ease. *If there existed a goddess, surely she'd have such a voice*, was how it seemed.

“—Uh umm, Vo, cation?”

Before she realized, the light on her hand had vanished, and the goddess-like voice, not to be heard. Having calmed down, Meiko noticed the words that had emerged on the page with the magic circle.

Reading them, she came to grasp the circumstances. Vocation, dungeon, transfer gate. It wasn't very believable, yet she had to acknowledge reality.

“I-it'll be tough... but we have to get back home, with everyone”

After much deliberation, Futaba Meiko at last took on the resolve to enter the dungeon.

Gripped in her shaking hands was a bulky butcher's knife. The characteristic rectangular blade sparkled with an intimidation as if saying it could make easy work of a whole cow.

Futaba Meiko belongs to Shiramine Private Academy's cooking club. Her hobby is food. That include both the preparation and dining of.

Being a missionary of the *faith of gourmet* since her younger days, her skill in the preparation of food grew along side the girth of her body. Making a lot, eating as much. It is the logical result.

At any rate, on September 20th, the Monday after a 3 day long weekend, Meiko went to class with the personal knife set in her bag like always. Surely, after school that day, she'd again use these cherished, well sharpened knives on fine culinary creations, but by some twist of fate, they had become weapons for her self protection.

There was Kitaoji Ruriko, a friend in the same class 2-7, in addition to an adequate amount of other people also belonging to that club, but the one serious enough to bring their own knives was Meiko only.

Though she was currently equipped with the best gear, the prospect of her openly fearful and crybaby self swinging a blade almost crushed her heart. In fact, she was at her limit just holding on to the butcher's knife. She couldn't imagine pointing it towards the violent beasts known as monsters. Even if the opponent was a chihuahua-sized stray dog, she likely couldn't do it.

She could cut apart any number of ingredients, but something still alive was a no go. She could easily exercise her blade on seafood, like fish or octopi only.

"I-it's fine... since I have the Knight vocation... I'll be fine..."

Futaba Meiko was granted the vocation of 'Knight'. From the explanation in the notebook, there was no problem in fighting ability, it wasn't a bad draw.

Novice skills being 3: 'Abandon', 'Repel', and 'Blessed Body'.^[2]

'Abandon': Can react to the enemy's attack.

'Repel': Repel enemy attacks using weapons or armor.

'Blessed Body': A blessed body strong against injury and sickness.

A simple description of her powers had been entered into her head at some point, so she could quickly understand them. However, how to utilize these 3 skills to fight, Meiko had not a clue.

It wasn't a problem of her mental faculties, her grades were on the high end in fact. But unfortunately, there was no way she could logically come to the best solutions in this abnormal situation. To add, Meiko was quite distant from the world of RPG and action games. Her minute experience of gaming only comprised of those popular among girls like that simulation with warm

interactions between forest animals, and that famous puzzle game where you connected tiles with round jellies to make them disappear.^[3]

She had no idea what to think of this ‘vocation’ with its game-like skill system.

But fortunately, Meiko’s first encounter in the dark passages of the dungeon wasn’t a monster, but a familiar face, a classmate.

“—You’re, Futaba-san? Thank goodness, you’re safe.”

The person she encountered on a narrow crossroads was, possessing a slender, calm beauty completely contrasting Futaba Meiko, the class representative of class 2–7, Kisaragi Ryouko.

“K-Kisaragi-san! *Fwaa*— so glad, I’m so glad you’re here!”

Ryouko’s ever present calm and intelligent presence even inside the dungeon gave Meiko a peerless feeling of relief.

“W-wait Futaba-san, calm down”

Taken slightly aback by the large mass approaching her, Ryouko tries to calm the teary-eyed Meiko.

“—I’m pretty anxious about this place myself, but the goal is clear. No matter what, let’s get ourselves out of this mess and return to our world as fast as we can”

Walking along the passage which looked hard like concrete, talking about their situation brought back a bit more peace of mind to Meiko. Most of all, Ryouko’s strong words alighted hope in her heart that was crumbling in despair.

Kisaragi Ryouko and Meiko weren’t particularly close. You could count on one hand the amount of times they’d conversed. Still, Meiko knew. Knew that she wasn’t only of gorgeous appearance, but her grades and athleticism were also outstanding. Being called ‘class rep’ by everyone, her skill in leadership was also a guarantee. Moreover, she showed not the slightest fear in facing the greatest delinquent Tendou Ryuuichi who had sent a dozen punks from Black high to the hospital. In fact, she had the courage to even assert dominance over him.

Invoking a feeling of both admiration and abandon at never being able to reach her height. That was the girl known as Kisaragi Ryouko.

“Hey Futaba-san, have you tried out this vocation thing?”

“Eh? A-umm... not yet”

“I see, I haven’t gone past the description either, but seems like we have no choice but to try them now huh”

After exploring the dungeon with Ryouko for some dozens of minutes, the time had come all too quick.

It was a round open space where many paths met. Contrasting the dreary gray road up till now, it was an area of green. The walls overgrown in ivy, crooked trees spanned from floor to ceiling as if replacing pillars.

But what widened Meiko’s eyes was not the abrupt change in scenery of this place, but its dwellers.

“Ha, ah... Those are... rats, right?”

From inside the slight darkness, with creepy red eyes, an animal familiar to the Japanese, it was a rat. Particularly, its size was larger than what one would imagine. It certainly wasn’t something you could describe as slightly larger than normal.

Dirty gray fur, and a long, narrow, hairless tail like an earthworm. A rat from all directions, except size, which was closer to a cat. It could bite back against a cat even if it wasn’t cornered.

Furthermore, this rat would, in reality, be able to make easily bite apart any cat. Since, in place of canines that facilitate chewing, its mouth was equipped with 2 sharp fangs like that of a saber-tooth tiger. It proclaimed its threat by releasing grinding sounds from its fangs and lines of saw-like teeth.

This kind of rat monster had appeared before Ryouko and Meiko. And in great quantity.

“No way... S-so manyy...”

Her large stature shaken, Meiko completely stiffened in fear. Forget attacking, she was currently the best tasting prey, one who couldn’t even run away. And not even lacking in filling. The rats were practically drooling a river at the sight.

No reason for holding back. They probably hadn't scripted it out, but the rats, widening their eyes and mouths, all at once, began to move.

“—Ice Sagittaice arrow”^[4]

Just then, though her spine was frozen stiff, Meiko felt a real coolness on her skin. Right after, *shingg*, a shrill sound entered her ears. And then finally, she came to understand what had occurred before her.

“Wow... you can really use magic”

She easily praised the cool class rep. It was that amazing a phenomenon.

Ryouko's right arm extended, before it stood an icicle. Having pierced 2 of the rats at the same time.

Meiko hadn't seen it launch, but she could easily guess. Ryouko had invoked a magic that threw ice. And this transparent ice broke through the rats' bodies further staining their dirty gray fur in deep red blood.

Perhaps the rats became wary of the unprecedented counter. The pack halted its rush. Like an ebbing wave, they turned and took distance. And again, with great agility, they began to encircle Ryouko and Meiko.

“It pretty great, but it won't clear the way”

Ryouko seemed to have calmly analysed her power and the enemies' strength. Even in this crisis, she could make use of her head, and furthermore, take action upon that forethought. Ryouko was of astounding courage and guts.

Lest it be ignored, Kisaragi Ryouko's magic prowess too, was astounding.

“الجليد الباردة تجميد انتشار النار”
“Ice Blastfrozen emission’!”

Along with a chant in a completely incomprehensible mystery language, Ryouko shouted what was likely the magic's name. Pushing both hands out at front with all her might, she manifested the 'Ice Blast'.

She created a blizzard. That was Meiko's impression.

From Ryouko hands surged air cold like the freezing gales of a midwinter blizzard, and the next moment, the rats moving in front of them were frozen

solid. Impossible to count, a great many of them.

With that single cast, about all of the rats on the forefront were annihilated. Their squalid gray bodies dyed in white snow, they had become unmoving statues of ice.

Faced with the fact that a large number of their allies had suddenly been slain, the rats were unable to take appropriate measures— meaning, they weren't able to make the quick decision of escape. Or perhaps, Ryouko's second volley was simply too fast.

"That should do it—"

One after another, she kept invoking 'Ice Blast'. This time mowing down the flock built up on her peripherals. The rats scampering on the ground had no ability to avoid the fierce gale that instantly froze them to the core.

"Amazing... Kisaragi-san..."

Soon enough, the pack of rats was no more. More than half frozen, the rest fled like baby spiders. Afterwards, the only things left behind were the creepy ice statues of monster rats.^[5]

"Phew, I'm glad that went well. With this magic, we can make do from now on"

So dazzling was the gentle smile of Ryouko. So much, that to Meiko, her own useless self looked like an ugly pig.

"Now, let's go, Futaba-san"

Relief from overcoming the crisis, and faith in Ryouko. With those, and, deep in her heart, a slight sense of inferiority, Meiko stepped forward.

"—I see, Kisaragi-san's vocation must be Ice Mage then"^[6]

With a proper vocation, I guess you can fight like that. I feel a bit of jealousy boiling up, but if I was in her shoes, suddenly able to launch ice magic, I have doubts it'd go so well.

It's highly likely that when these large rats with overgrown fangs, lets call them 'Fang Rats'— when this pack of fang rats was so easily done in, it was

undeniably by the superior talents of the individual Kisaragi Ryouko.

I had this thought from before, or should I say, I had indirectly felt it. That she was of the same type as Souma-kun or Tendou-kun. High-spec'ed, normieriajuu, there're many easy words to describe them, but in the end it's *that*. beauty, brains, body, and even personality is top notch, winners in life.

“Direct attacks with ice arrows, and a cold air emission area attack. Full points in versatility huh... on that point, there's 3 novice skills so she must have another one. Futaba-san, do you know?”

“Eh, umm... Sorry, I don't”

Her brows arching as if troubled, Futaba-san made an apologetic face. *I'm not blaming you ok, so that face is a bit troubling for me.*

Giving a nice and gentle follow up line here might've been the perfect thing a man could do, but unfortunately, my deficiency in handsome-points makes that action unavailable. I thought about how to reply for a few seconds, but ended up with nothing in particular. Pathetic.

“...You not knowing probably means it was an always passive skill, or maybe she was intentionally keeping it from you.”

My ‘Pain Return’ and ‘Intuition Pharmacy’ worked without any chants or special actions, they were the always-active type. Futaba-san's ‘Blessed Body’ must be the same.

“Ah sorry, I kinda interrupted your talk”

Up till now, the plot's going in an enviously easy dungeon capturing direction. We haven't reached the scene where she, Futaba Meiko, is left absolutely bloody at the fairy square.

“Yeah, so then, you see—”

Really, what horrid truth will spill from that mouth of hers? I already don't have a good feeling about this, but yet, keep listening to Futaba-san's tale.

[1]貴女/kijo, an archaic 2nd person Japanese pronoun. Untranslatable so ‘thee’.

[2]Skill names... 『見切り』『弾き』『恵体』, I don't know if there's any commonly used English translations for these, but that's what I have. 'Abandon' seems to be related to Monster Hunter's 'Reckless Abandon' by name, and 'Blessed Body', is sometimes refers to a (sexy) girl with good proportions.

[3]So basically, Animal Crossing, and Bejewelled.

[4]I'll put the attack name meanings up as ruby text on occasion.

[5]Baby spiders.. is this a Kumo ref? I hope!

[6]Back to Kotarou POV. On that note, I won't be announcing these changes in POV anymore, it's kinda obvious and feels like I'm insulting the reader's intelligence. If you think it's necessary, let me know.

Chapter 11: Futaba Meiko part.2

Futaba Meiko and Kisaragi Ryouko smoothly progressed through the dungeon.

Every monster appearing along the way made for easy fodder against Ryouko's ice magic. The dog-like mid-sized monsters ate her 'Ice Sagitta', the fang rats and insect type small-sized ones were blown away by 'Ice Blast'.

Meiko had to only follow along behind her. Not a chance to make use of her vocation of 'Knight'. It was a safe and happy stroll in the dungeon.

And several hours after the fang rat incident, the two of them finally arrived at the dungeon's only known safe space, a fairy square.

"Looks like using these powers a lot can get you new ones. Look, Futaba-san —'Ice Shield'"

While on their break, Ryouko tests out her newly gained skill. In front of where she held out her hand, suddenly from nothing, a mass of ice, nay, a shield of ice manifested. At around 180 cm5'11" high, the ice, sprung forth from the ground, would protect the caster's whole body from frontal attacks.

Blurting out "Waa—" as if she'd seen a splendid magic trick, Meiko listened to Ryouko's explanation with her eyes bedazzled.

"Like the name says, it's a defence magic. If possible, I'd like not to receive attacks where I'd be forced to use it though."

Her battles with monsters using magic were, so far, flawless victories. Yet Ryouko did not grow pretentious, and seemed to be calmly analysing their situation.

Nevertheless, she was not someone exempt of danger. Indeed, danger is always sudden, hidden around the corner waiting its chance.

"—! This is bad, Futaba-san, get back!"

Ryouko's voice, tinged with impatience, echoed throughout the dome packed in verdure.

The 2 girls, finishing their break at the fairy square in under an hour, again delved into the dungeon, and soon enough, arrived at a great circular area sizing at more than 3 times that of a gymnasium. Like the room where the fang rats appeared en masse, it was a place overflowing with arbre, giving the impression of a small forest. Looking above, there seemed to be what looked like steel arches which gave the area the shape of a dome, so rather than a forest, it could be seen as more of a botanical garden. Moreover, the rectangular panels devices that released white light were partially destroyed, making it seem more like a dark, deserted building.

In that place, Ryouko and Meiko were suddenly under attack.

From the shadows and trees, multiple forms emerged. These forms seemed human at first glance, but their stature, about a head or so shorter, and their permanently hunched posture, made you see them more like monkeys.

To summarize, these are humanoid monsters that dwelled in the dungeon. They actively attacked people and preyed on their meat, a detestable existence even to this world.

They are called 'Goma'.

This information itself was procured from the magic circle just a few moments prior when checking it at the fairy square. Still, equating the written information with these ugly, obsidian beings in front of them was impossible for even the quick-witted Ryouko.

Still, her having defended successfully with her newly acquired 'Ice Shield' was indeed deserving of praise. Slashing attacks from the knives they wielded, arrows from beyond the thicket, they were all blocked by the bulky shield of ice.

Meanwhile, Futaba Meiko was in a daze, Ryouko used two shots of 'Ice Sagitta' to finish off the goma holding a knife and axe, at which point, the former finally let out a cry from fear.^[1]

Boldly charging in with her ice magic was Ryouko. On the other hand, Meiko equipped with the sharp meat cleaver mostly just cried in disarray. That was perhaps still better than her swinging it wildly in the darkness.^[2]

"These ones are, way too persistent!"

Up till this point, any monsters getting a taste of Ryouko's ice chose swift retreat. After losing 2 or 3 of their pack, they'd understand their powerlessness, or perhaps think the compatibility was off, promptly scurrying away. Though called monsters, they likely had the reasonable instincts of a wild animal.

Yet, maybe they had a fixation with humans, or perhaps they were so demented, the 5 or 6— including the ones pierced in ice, 10 goma, show no intention of ceasing their assault.

“—‘Ice Shield’!”

What was more worrisome than their absurd tenacity, was the occasional arrow whistling by from the darkness.

From what Ryouko could perceive at a glance, they were using arrowheads uneven in both shape and length, certainly not of metal, but sharpened stone or perhaps of bone from monsters or animals. Possessing no such thing as a fletching, their aim was far from perfect; overall arrows of crude and unreliable make.

But still, once nocked, drawn and released, the arrow will fly. Whether stone, or bone, it will pierce if sharpened. Soft human skin, possessing no such thing as a steel-like armor shell, wearing only a sailor uniform. She had no natural defences to prevent arrows.

Under the seemingly endless volley of arrows, Ryouko was slowly, but most assuredly, being cornered. Those poor excuses for arrows would never hit. But, if even one of them did, that would decide the match. With an arrow stuck somewhere in her body, could she use magic like right now, could she run away, could she, even think normally?

Ryouko was using ‘Ice Blast’ as a diversion, mixing in her main attack ‘Ice Sagitta’, in a desperate retreat from the forested dome.

Protecting the crying, uselessly large and largely useless pig behind her, Ryouko continued invoking her magic without a single complaint.

In the darkness, surrounded by trees, her visibility was quite limited. But the goma seemed to have good night vision even in that obscurity, and wouldn't lose sight of them. They can't see, the enemy can. One vs. many. It was a

miracle she was able to hold off that long.

“—Got’cha!”

Not letting the slightest movement in the bushes slip, she would kill the bone short-spear wielding goma as soon as it jumped out. Ryouko had no doubt her magic having the power to do so.

Her strength, mana, concentration, none of them had yet to wane, but then—

“Kh, ouch!?”

Her lucky streak ran out. An arrow with a blue crystal head grazed Ryouko’s left thigh. On her clean white skin ran a painful line of scarlet.

It wasn’t fatal. But from the sudden shock of pain while running, she pitched forward and fell. Her falling posture perfect. With her level of athleticism, there’s no reason she’d let herself plunge face first into the ground.^[3]

But from turning over to limit the shock, to getting back up again, there was a critical gap.

“Damn—”

When she got back up, she found 2 goma closing in.

One held a blunt-edged knife, and the other, a rusted hatchet. And both had an absolutely nauseating appearance with muddy yellow eyes, and squalid lines of teeth peeking from inside their mouths wide agape. From their filthy bodies drifted an odour, a horrendous melange of sulfur like from rotten eggs, and decaying fish. That along with their further ammoniac smell like that of toilet cleaning fluid, it made for the worst stimulus to your senses.

Urggh, as she tried to suppress her nausea, knitting those elegant, thin brows, the goma swung up their weapons, their prey to be caught in another step.

“A, ah, Kisaragi-san!”

At this point, Meiko finally stopped her slow running, and turned around. Being one-sidedly protected, she had been facing forward, concentrating solely on moving her legs, and even with her piggish, slow self, a small distance had opened up between her and Ryouko.

Naturally, even if she turned back now, she had no means to save Ryouko. Meiko was of vocation Knight. She possessed no magic based ranged attacks.

Indeed, Kisaragi Ryouko wouldn't be saved, unless of course, there was a third party involved.

“Ryouko-chan, you alright!?”

Along with the voice of a young girl rang dirty, hoarse screams.

What appeared first in Ryouko's eyes was the scene of 2 goma that had come as close as face to face, grandly falling over. She got a glimpse of the rusted knives stuck, on the throat of one, and the chest of another.

“No way, Minami!? How—”

“Just by chance! Now, run!”

Ryouko began running alongside the other girl. Her leg was in pain, but didn't seem to hinder movement. But more importantly, about this other girl.

Natsukawa Minami. That was the name of her classmate and savior.

Big, round, cat-like eyes were her charm point. Her bob-cut hair and well-tanned cocoa brown skin gave her an energetic image. Not undermining that impression, she was in fact even more lively and vigorous than she would initially let on.

She had allocated all that excess energy to the track and field club, being known as the new hope in her first year, and presently in her 2nd, attained the seat of ace. Naturally, her match was the sprint. With an explosive dash resembling her own personality, she had taken Shiramine Academy Track and Field all the way to the nationals.

This hardcore runner girl known as Minami and Kisaragi Ryouko were friends on a first name basis. She was the super girl of her club, and barely passing tests in class. Ryouko the class rep gallantly taking on the duty of aiding to improve her miserable grades was common fact in class 2–7. The super serious Ryouko would lend her homework to this Natsukawa Minami and Tendou Ryuuichi only.

[4]

That aside, the hot and lively Minami, and cool and intelligent Ryouko. Their

personalities may be the exact opposite, but their bond contrarily was just as strong. They wouldn't even hesitate to call each other best friends.

"Thanks, I owe you one, Minami"

"Nihaha, getting Ryouko-chan to owe me one, it's a once-in-a-life-time miracle!"

Her road to absolute despair had transformed into a path of hope thanks to her friend's smile, fiercely brilliant like the sun. Ryouko's heart, halfway given up, newly overflowed with strength.

"I'd love to celebrate our reunion, but we need to get away from those guys first"

"No probs, got you covered—"

Minami smiled like a mischievous child, and pointed at one of the passages connected to the wall. Indeed, there was no need to point it out as they had been rushing that way already.

Incidentally, having confirmed the saving grace of Minami, Meiko resumed her mad, wild-boar rush, coincidentally towards the same direction. Her head in chaos, there being no way to know if she was intentionally following Ryouko, but luckily they were all running in the same direction.

Moreover, having splendidly tripped on the curb of the intersection between the dome and passage and fallen inside, she had no clue of her astounding luck.

When the two others reached a Meiko in her embarrassing full view display of blush pink panties tight around her large butt, Minami shouted out,

"Now, Satou-chan! Shoot!"

In place of a reply, a single arrow flew through between the two. Its shining head spawned from inside the passage, and flew out into the dome. Its aim, not the goma chasing after them, but a strangely crooked tree, hitting right in the middle of its trunk as wide as a bunch of people. Making the abundant green leafage quiver, it made a dull sound.

A *miss*— jumping to the conclusion too quick, Ryouko realized that it had hit its mark perfectly.

brrr, the ground trembled and then, disappeared. Not that of the passage they were on, but of inside the dome they had just escaped from a couple moments ago. Just beyond the curb, the earth in a 10 meter^{33'} diameter, turned to mist and vanished.

“Eh, the heck is this...”

Having the solid ground she had just stepped on, vanishing in front her eyes as if a mirage, made Ryouko mutter out astoundedly.

“It’s a pitfall. Seems like you can set up these kind of traps in quite a few spots here.”

Minami said casually as if live commentating on a game.

“Are pitfalls like, supposed to suddenly disappear like that?”

“Who knows? Isn’t it like a magic trap?”

It was a Minami-style thoughtless response, and truthfully, she couldn’t think of anything better. Ryouko herself had been exercising the phenomenon known as magic. That in mind, there’s nothing strange about there being traps impossible to replicate back on Earth. No, this being a place called *dungeon*, there’s no way they would be.

“Anyway, now those uglies won’t be coming after us anymore, so let’s get going”

The pit was made as if protecting the entrance of the passage they had jumped into. Peeking over the edge, one could see, not an everlasting abyss of black, but a white mist like dry ice blocking the view to the bottom. But undoubtedly, its depth was greater than human height.

The goma gradually gathered on the other side of the opening, as if chagrined at the loss of easy prey. *Gyaagyaa*, they screeched obnoxiously, but not one attempted to jump over to the other side.

Perhaps they knew the dangers of falling in there, or maybe even they had some reserves toward unforeseen traps. At the very least, this proved that goma weren’t able to make a 10-meter jump. Their strength was likely not so different from that of humans.

“Right, I want to hear a lot of things, but we should get moving for now”

With that, having narrowly escaped danger, Ryouko and Meiko leave behind the dome, and the screeching goma.

“Natsukawa-san’s vocation would be ‘Thief’ right?”^[5]

“Um, yes it is... how’d you know?”

With her round face and round eyes, Futaba-san asks utterly flabbergasted.

The one saving Kisaragi Ryouko at the nick of time was our track and field ace, Natsukawa Minami. Knowing her talents anyone could easily imagine her as— or is that just my gamer brain running wild again?

“No well, she was using knives and traps, so I kinda guessed”

“Yup, right, Natsukawa-san was using a knife, and could make pitfalls and find hidden doors you know”

Knife throwing and detection skills should be considered a given.

“Do you know her skill names?”

“Err, yeah... there was ‘Throw Dagger’ that made her good at throwing knives, and ‘Search Sense’ and uh... oh yeah something called ‘Quick Step’... umm, I think she said something about martial arts and was happily running really fast”^[6]

I see, so knife throwing, trap searching, and speed enhancing skills. They do seem like novice skills for a Thief.

“And she also learned ‘Slash’ and, ‘Abandon’ like I have on the way”

“What does ‘Slash’ do?”

“Well, I was always watching from behind so I don’t really get it... but I think she said it makes cutting much easier”

As the simplistic name states, it would have the effect of raising the power in a swing when the knife is used to cut. This should probably also be categorized as a ‘Martial Art’. From these names and descriptions, I get the image of a skill system separated from magic. Well, I don’t really care what the official types are though.

“What can I say, she seems pretty strong, that Natsukawa-san”

“Yeah, really strong! When the monsters came, she was always fighting at the very front”

Seems she’s been playing the role of vanguard quite well. With Kisaragi-san using her ice magic as rear guard, they must’ve made a great combo. It’s like they got the standard fantasy arrangement going well with the melee fighter as a wall, and attack mage shooting from the back.

“But I was... just so useless...”

I guess she got reminded of her inferiority in power to Natsukawa-san while we were on the subject. The thought cast a cloud over Futaba-san’s visage, slight tears gathering at the edges of her round eyes.

If I act now with kind, gentle, and overall compassionate words to her, I too can become one of the winners in life, but sorry to say, I let that chance go to waste.

This girl’s been a useless load on everyone’s shoulders in the story till now, just my humble opinion. I may not be cool and handsome, but I can at least read the mood which reads not to speak that opinion out.

“S-so um... The Satou who shot the arrow, was it Satou-kun the guy, or Satou-san the girl?”

To conclude, the option I picked was, pretending not to hear Futaba-san’s self-deprecating mutterings, and continue with the story. *Ignore* is a useful skill I believe.

“Ah, sorry... It’s Satou-san the girl. Satou Aya-san”

So that her first name. Honestly, I just knew the surname.

She, like me, wasn’t someone who stood out. Speaking of which, there’s too much of a gap between the normal people in our class and the super high-spec ones like Souma-kun and Tendou-kun. When I saw my class roster, I thought they must’ve wanted to put all these cheat-status guys in one place. Of course, Kisaragi Ryouko and Natsukawa Minami were also of the superior group.

“Satou-san’s an Archer?”

“Yup, she said she was in the archery club in middle school”

Since we’re supposed to get a ‘Vocation’ best suited to our abilities, well, I guess having a bit of experience doesn’t hurt. If they weren’t completely useless at everything, even the gods would grant something they were familiar with.

Not saying I’ve seen how skilled Satou Aya is, but she wouldn’t be better than Souma Sakura with her nationals tier talent.

“So you guys met up with Natsukawa-san and Satou-san, only those two?”

“Yeah, as for others... We found someone’s bag on the way, but didn’t meet anyone else”

What came into mind was the scene of those demons called goma that were eating a girl. If they were eaten like that, no way there’d be any body left.

Shit, remembering it made me sick to my stomach. Let’s not—

“So you guys were now a 4 person team...”

Oh man, this number 4, made it worse. As in, the punchline’s already been revealed.

Revealed to be exactly what I imagined when I found Futaba-san left dying in this fairy square.

[1]So I’ll declare now that the plural of goma is goma. No particular reason I just don’t like the sound of ‘gomas’. Like fish, or anime. If you say animes... I hate you.

[2]Retcon: Butcher knife -> meat cleaver

[3]Ukemi: it’s a Judo thing, she fell without much damage basically.

[4]So I write fullnames as [Lastname Firstname] like in jap. Also I try to use the name exactly as it is in the raw. Now to the point: I don’t think I need to say this but calling each other by first name is a big-ish thing for japs. Well atleast in these weeb media things. I think most readers have an understanding of this concept, but yeah, only buddies call each other by first name. And super buddies even drop the –chan –kun honorific bs. Not really, it all really depends on the story, but you can generally tell how close people are by what they call

each other.

[5]3rd person → Momokawa POV. desu.

[6]So, 'Throw Dagger' and 'Search Sense' are english, as in katakana from the author, so I've kept them as is. 'Quick Step' is a bit troubling. the kanji (疾駆) is the same as Yuuto's (hero) 'High Walk' but instead of the katakana, it was it said something different/ same meaning in hiragana. I think it's ok to think of these two as the same thing but who knows, the hero's one might be special. So I renamed it.

Chapter 12: Futaba Meiko part.3

It was smooth sailing. Kisaragi Ryouko who could manage to traverse the dungeon solo, now had gained allies: The Thief, Natsukawa Minami, and the Archer Satou Aya. They seemed practically invincible.

Minami had a combination of her hitherto nurtured athletics which, together with her vocational skills, made her a perfect melee fighter. As for Aya, she was, as she appeared, of average talents but, her vocation instantly enabled her to enter battle.

‘Aim’: Increases aim, thereby raising the strength and accuracy of the bow.

‘Concentrate’: Can draw the bow without faltering of mind.’

‘Fletchery’: Can make arrows well.^[1]

Though nothing blatantly overpowered, needing just a bow, attack and ammunition are covered while leaving room for improvement; they were a well balanced set of novice skills.

Luckily, Aya had cleared the first big hurdle of procuring a bow early on. Aya had met Minami just when the latter was about to take down a goma with a bow, it was practically like a blessing from the god of archery.

And now, a few hours after leading the dome and entering a fairy square, that girl was yelling hysterically.

“—Eh, let me get this straight, so this means only three of us will be saved!?”

“C-calm down, it’s okay, so just calm down alright!”

Even Minami, whose cheerful smile and relaxed attitude wouldn’t crumble during dangerous dungeon battles, voiced those words tinged with impatience and unease.

“W-w-wh-what do we d-d-do...”

Quivering with all her plus sized body, Futaba Meiko was all too quickly in tears.

It wasn't uncalled for them to fall into so much disarray. Since, when they checked on the updated information on the magic circle, they were made aware of that shocking rule.

The transfer gate located at the deepest part of the dungeon would only allow a maximum of 3 people to enter— that is, there was a limit to the number of people who could escape.

“We don't know the veracity this information. So let's not think too much about it.”

Only one of the four, Kisaragi Ryouko, was calm, and trying to put everyone at ease.

“Don't think about it, then the heck *are* we supposed to think!”

Apparently 'Concentrate' only had effect when using the bow, in other times, there would be no convenient calming of mind. As if demonstrating the validity of that statement, Aya furiously argued back.

“We have to get a lot more monster cores to use this transfer gate. It's been quite easy up till now, but who knows what's to come. So don't risk yourself with useless worries while fighting”

“But, then wh—”

“What we need to do right now, is hope”

Aya looked at the class rep, who said all that with a straight face, as if she was talking to a mental case.

“So you're just... gonna give me those sugared up lines even now”

“They aren't just pretty words. Since we, we really do have a hope”

Ryouko proclaimed those words with a gentle smile of an utter confidence, no, a conviction one could say. Taken slightly aback from that bold counter, Aya asked the standard follow, *'What would that be?'*.

“Souma Yuuto and Tendou Ryuuichi. If it's those two, they can definitely overcome this, yes, even this crazy place.”

Not one of them could deny or laugh at her answer. Most likely, not a single

member class 2–7 would disagree.

“Look, even we can fight those monster with our vocations. I bet those 2 with this power, would easily become real superheroes”

Ryouko’s words were not to be considered pitiable or faith based absurdity. Anyone would think so if they knew those two. Anyone would believe.

“We’re headed to the same place, so if we continue on like this, we’ll absolutely convene with Souma-kun. And then he’ll save you, and everyone else too”

“S-Souma-kun will save me...”

Perhaps she was imagining Souma Yuuto’s gallant figure as he leapt head first into danger. Aya’s cheeks blushed cerise, and her face dissolved into rapture.

Ryouko wouldn’t condemn her for such a display. Around half the girls of class 2–7 would show the same reaction.

Like the boys who would fall for Souma Sakura’s beauty at first glance, the girls would have a similar wanting for Souma Yuuto. Satou Aya, she too was one of those who had secret feelings of wanting to be near him.

“Yes, believe me, Satou-san. Souma-kun, will come save us”

“—Fha! Y-you’re right... Souma-kun’s the type who can really do it”

Aya quickly agrees, saving face as if she had only been logically convinced.

“Yup, well said, we’ll be just fine with Souma-kun around! This is like a game world, so rather than superhero, he’d be like, a warrior hero?”^[2]

Silver armor and a cape fit him perfectly, that had been proven on the stage play at the school cultural festival the previous year. The piece was Snow White. His role merely that of passing by at the end to give kiss, but his presence, more prince-like than any prince, almost made you forget the whole tragedy that was the brunt of the story.

“But rather than Souma-kun, Ryouko-chan’s prince charming is more like Tendou-ku—”

“H-hey, stop that Minami! We’re not like that ok!”

Ryouko reacts just like Aya did a few moments ago, Minami giving her the usual wide, teasing grin. In these situations, even the cool class rep. is an open book.

“Nihaha, I’ll leave it at that then.”

“Why— you little!”

“Hey, ow! Wait, no violence please! And no using magic either!”

Her pretty face dyed red, Ryouko one-sidedly catfighting her friend, was an image distant from the ever reliable class rep. She looked more like a grade-schooler.

In that fashion, these girls had not made the information about the number restriction a big issue. That is, not yet.

The 4 resumed their journey.

It had been 10 minutes since, having rested with a nap, reinvigorating both their strength and vitality, at the fairy square, at which point their next encounter with monsters was upon them.

What appeared was a pack of wild dogs with blazing red fur. At a size somewhere between a Shiba and a Golden Retriever, their rough panting and blood-shot eyes plainly displayed their savage nature.

“—Sorry! 3 incoming!”

Minami shouts while slicing open a dog at the neck with the chef’s knife in her right hand. 4 others had gotten around past her with the vigour of a fireball, but she had back-thrown the knife in her left hand, hitting one dead on the back. As a result, like Minami said, 3 of them were headed towards the two rearguards.

“Futaba-san, you’re on!”

Sharp instructions from Ryouko. The rear was occupied by the Ice Mage, Kisaragi Ryouko and Archer, Satou Aya. The Knight, Futaba Meiko was to be together with Minami at the front— was not something anyone expected of her, so she was put at the awkward position of mid-guard.

Though she, as a Knight, should be at the very forefront, tanking the enemy, she had been given the kind and considerate task of stopping even just one of

the ones getting past Minami, a Thief.

“Kya—! Waa—!”

As if ripping apart that kindness from her allies, Meiko put full power into dodging. Without having swung her meat cleaver even once, she simply dropped it and rolled across the ground. Her figure exactly resembling a beer barrel rolling down a slope.^[3]

“The hell, are you do—ing!”

Her target set with ‘Concentrate’ Aya burst her shot with ‘Aim’ together with her angry voice. The goma-brand arrow pierced the fangs born, drool slobbering, fast approaching dog deeply right between the eyes. 100% accuracy. And, 1-hit-kill.

“...‘Ice Sagitta’”

Ryouko’s icicle was thicker and longer than an arrow, but certainly didn’t fire any slower than the bow. Even without a specific skill, her aim was true, and beautifully struck through the dog’s torso.

The 2 rearguards took out 2 of the dogs instantly, but there were a total of 3 approaching. There was still one left. Very close. A 2nd arrow or icicle wouldn’t make it.

The dog, as if assured of its kill, raised sparks as it clanked its jaws.

“Ugh, shi—”

“‘Ice Shield’”

Just then, a shield of ice soundlessly appeared, and the dog, having jumped in, mouth open wide for the kill, foolishly crashed headlong into it. Raising a miserable whine, the dog’s body promptly dropped to the ground.

“Though I can’t rapid-fire attack magic, defensive ones don’t seem to have that limitation, looks like”

Explaining this to Aya with a chill expression, Ryouko shot the dog with another ‘Ice Sagitta’ before it got back up.

“Ryouko-chan! Satou-chan! You guys ok!?”

At this point, the pack of red dogs was making hasty retreat. Minami didn't give chase, and was running back, worried about her friends.

"Sigh... I'm seriously glad we got Kisaragi-san with us"

"Satou-san, you beat enemies too, so you're not too shabby yourself"

"Hey, I've got the highest kill count! So praise me more Ryouko-chan!"

"You don't have to tell me, it's because you're giving it your all at front that we in the back can actually attack, Minami"

At the cheerily bantering three stared Futaba Meiko, in all her ugly, dirt-smeared glory. Rising sluggishly like a bovine after its afternoon siesta, she hoisted up her round frame.

However, she didn't have the courage to take a single step in returning to the other three.

"...Futaba-san, are you okay? hurt anyplace?"

Ryouko called out to a Meiko, hesitating at the corner of the room, in a gentle voice.

"Yes, I... I'm sorry, I'll, go get the cores now"

No one was blaming Meiko for her unseemly display. Certainly, Satou Aya was glaring at her with unobstructed scorn, but there were no hateful comments actually being made.

But if anyone were to condemn her behavior, Meiko wouldn't have any valid refutation. She knew, knew exactly how incompetent and useless she currently was. Everyone was fighting with their lives on the line, while Meiko was so scared, so utterly terrified when enemies approached her, that she knew no action but to run. In reality, she did run. Not giving a damn about her allies, just herself.

"Then, if you'd be so kind. You're in the cooking club, Futaba-san, so you seem to be familiar with dressing and the like"

"She's like, the right *woman* for the job? Nihaha, It's a bit too much for mee"

It was not enough to just defeat monsters. Unlike in games, there was nothing

like experience points that showed a solid numerical measurement of growth, never mind the corpse disappearing in smoke to reveal gold coins or item drops; even for a world of fantasy and magic, that was too much to ask.

There was no point in not collecting the core planted inside the cadaver. If they reached the transfer gate and didn't have enough to actually power it, that would be a real problem.

"S-sorry... There was just three"

Making full use of her set of knives, Meiko quickly finished dismantling the dogs' bodies and retrieving the cores with the proficiency of a seasoned chef. On top of her plump palms certainly rested 3 small cores like broken red marbles.

The number of dogs they had beaten were 10. Meiko missing another 7 cores was not because she had failed to find them but because they simply didn't exist. As for the fang rats they had first defeated, not one of them contained cores.

Meiko who had been dealing with all the monster bodies on their journey, could easily tell if they contained cores or not. After skinning them a bit, she could somewhat sense them by presence. Additionally, she could also feel out what spot they were located. That is to say, core retrieval was a no brainer. Even without Meiko's culinary expertise, a novice could find it randomly poking around.

For this reason, the real problem was the low rate at which they were collecting cores.

It was a scary thought, but maybe it was useless collecting these tiny glass-fragment-like cores in the first place. That was one of the worse cases.

"Can't be helped, they were pretty weak monsters after all"

Ryouko received the 3 cores from Meiko with no complaint. Looking at it another way, there was no word of gratitude either.

"At the pace we're going, we'll level up any time now! Then it'll be a core smorgasbord!"

“But I don’t wanna fight stronger monsters... *Sigh*... If they don’t go down with one arrow... I just, no”

Minami tries to console the depressed and anxious Aya with her air-headed smile and optimism. And while Ryouko looked over them with a smile, they made their departure from that area.

Meiko, wallowing in shattering self-derision, followed the 3 from a step behind.

It was when, another 3 battles after the red dog encounter, they were on their 4th struggle.

What appeared were goma. The location, a passage crowded in trees withered white. It was less dense, and brighter than the forest dome where they teamed up with the Minami party, but there were more than enough blind spots.

“—Ah!”

Cried Meiko. She stood at the very rear. Having been deemed completely useless in combat, she was naturally positioned in an only-to-be-protected rear, even farther back than the rearguard team of Ice Mage and Archer.

However, that was the case only if the enemy appeared from in front. Even in games, there are attack patterns where the enemy comes from behind. And in real life, there was no way monsters wouldn’t be able to take a similar course of action.

“KyaaAAAA!”

Armed with a large naked claw as a knife, a goma jumped out from behind the white snags.

When Meiko turned and saw that suddenly appearing goma, with that figure, more repulsive than any demon, right at her face, she had completely forgotten to run and froze up.

“GuobuBiBA!”

It came slashing with a strange war cry. A straight, wide, horizontal swipe. Meiko could clearly see the movements of that goma.

With the Knight's 'Abandon', she could achieve the miracle of evading that attack with room to spare. Meiko could pre-cognitively see with a faint white glow, the exact trajectory of that blade.

She understood that the path of the blade was swiftly approaching her plump abdomen. She could fathom it.

There was room for dodging, and even defending.

'Repel' would allow her to use that meat cleaver she was holding to easily bounce back the coming strike. If she triggered it, the counter from Meiko's think arms would fling away the goma's attack along with its lightweight body, launching it straight to the ground.

Yet, the future with her taking that course of action would not come. Sole reason being, Futaba Meiko, and her own lack of courage. She cowered in fear. Her attacks, bound.

"Gyi, iyaAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAa!!"

Her middle was shred. A straight, level line. The goma, though a stranger to the way of the sword, had struck its target just as planned.

The blade of fang cut deeply into Meiko's belly. The cloth of her sailor uniform possessing no defence against the edge. That her layer of fat wouldn't be enough to stop the blade was something Meiko, who had cut, dressed marbled meat countless times, knew all too well.

Raising a deranged scream, more from the psychological shock from the attack than the violent pain, Meiko collapsed belly up.

"Bah, guRuA— GebA!"

As the goma swung up its knife, attempting to mount Meiko and deliver the killing blow, A chilling bolt of frost drove into its ugly, twisted face.

"Futaba-san!"

Luckily at that moment, the bout with the goma platoon had reached its terminus; which was a fact Meiko was bound not to notice.

At any rate, Ryouko, then Aya, and finally Minami too, quickly ran over to the injured Meiko.

“Huff, haa, ah... Aa... I-it h-ouw... It hurts...”

“Don’t talk! I’ll get first aid righ—”

“How are you gonna do that, we have no bandages or disinfectant!”

“B-Band-Aids, I have tho...”

“Those won’t do frick here!?”

The girls fell into a tumultuous panic. But to Meiko, whose mind gone blank in shock, they sounded just like the sports clubs people shouting their vigor-filled mantras as they practiced on the grounds outside.^[4]

“No it’s alright, we still have those herbs from the fairy square”

Ryouko had calmly, yes even in this uproar, calmly singled out the ideal solution.

What she retrieved from her bag was a mere handful of grass. With their particular heart shaped leaves, they were of a form quite similar to that of the 4-leafed clover.

“Herbs you... that’s everything we have you know!”

“Yes, but even one of these are very effective”

The wound on Ryouko’s left leg had all but disappeared. This was pulled off using only one of these 4-leafed herbs.

Thanks to the info from the magic circle, they knew the effects of this clover-like herb found at the fairy square. When they doubtfully tried it out, everyone had the thought that it must be a magic plant.

Its usage, simplicity itself. Just grind up and apply to the affected area.

“That’s what I mean! With a cut that deep, we’d need all of, no, maybe even all of it wouldn’t be enough”

“Yes, you’re absolutely right. We actually have... no guarantee it’ll work”

“So why the hell are you trying to waste our precious medicine!”

Indeed, this herb was precious. They could gather a handful of these from the fairy square overgrown in flora. The place was chock full of 3-leafed ones. Only

the 4-leafed one being curative. Having gone scouring for them like they were back in kindergarten, the 4 girls understood that the chances of finding one were as slim as on Earth.

“It’s not a waste, and if we don’t, Futaba-san will...”

“So what do you propose we do next time when it’s one of us! Can you guarantee we’ll find more of these at the next square? If someone gets there before us, I assure you they’ll be hoarding every one of them!”

Veins spreading in her eyes, discharging sputum, Aya kept on talking in a state of maximum frenzy. Nevertheless, her assertions indeed hinted at a slight soundness. Even Ryouko couldn’t completely refute her.

“So Satou-san, are you implying... we leave Futaba-san to die?”

Ryouko raised the ultimate question.

“... Isn’t that question’s a bit unfair? Kisaragi-san, You get it too, don’t you, honestly?”

At Aya’s reply in a warped smile, Ryouko impulsively averted her eyes.

“Y-you’re wrong, I’m...”

“No I’m not! I’m not the bad guy here ok, I mean, there’s no other way to look at this! Think a bit about the future, then anyone, even I get it you know!”

“But, that’s—”

“H-hold up!”

Minami came in to stop the two delving further into their unsightly squabble right in front of the victim. Speaking of whom, they realized they hadn’t noticed her at all since the part about band-aids being useless.

“Be any louder, it’s like you want more monsters. Like, there’s the blood too, those dog-like ones’ll smell us right away!”

At Minami’s very-likely-to-happen statement, Aya’s face paled, and Ryouko’s lost color. Realizing that, even as one of them was on the verge of life and death, they too were being exposed to danger.

“S-so let’s just get out—”

“Got us covered, I found a fairy square just a bit from here! Yeah, so let’s carry Futaba-san there first”

Minami points at the right of the T-junction where the passage of snag ends. Apparently, she had quickly gone and checked beyond there.

“Right, let’s. If there’s more herbs at that fairy square, then all our problems are as good as solved”

“... Hm, I guess”

Thus, the three immediately began working.

“N, ngu...”

Groaned languishedly, not Meiko, but Ryouko.

“Nghah! Heavy damnit! How many frickin’ kilosounds are you even packing!”

It was a miracle that three girls were able to lift Meiko’s massive frame. No, to be precise, they were only having her lean on their shoulders.

Feeling as if being crushed, they somehow or other managed to get Meiko walking. So as to suppress the bleeding even a little, Ryouko had wrapped her own jersey around her abdomen. Looking at the navy blue of the Shiramine Academy jersey steadily darkening from blood, its efficacy was doubtful.

“Huff... Haa... Finally, made it...”

Aya wheezes in ragged breaths. Ryouko was silent, and even the chippy Minami had lost her words.

“Let’s just, find those herbs...”

Beads of sweat accumulated on her forehead, Ryouko voiced the demand, and the three made for the fairy square’s herbage.

Meiko laid to sleep right by the fountain; the three silently searched with her occasional gripes of pain as BGM.

“...no good”

The result, obvious from those 2 words. A single stalk. That was the totality of the harvest.

“Haha... Ahaha... It’s over”

With a tired expression, Aya says, indolently seated on the lawn with her legs thrown out.

“Wh, hey, it’s over, you...”

On the verge of crying, Minami nervously looks back and forth between Aya and Ryouko.

“Don’t, make me say it ok... Hey, class rep, what do we do”

Ryouko had deeply furrowed her brows, choosing silence. How long had she hung her head in shame? Likely not even a minute, but yet, her painful silence felt eternal.

“Futaba-san... we can’t save her anymore”

A bitter decision.

“Eh!? Ryouko-chan!”

“Ahaha, you can stop the miss goody two-shoes act you know, Natsukawa-san”

“N-no, I wasn’t—”

“Like, it’s fine. It’s over, over means over ’kay. No one’s fault here”

Aya was muttering ‘fault’, ‘not my fault’ in-between dry laughter. How could she, a normal highschooler, be expected to keep composed after these cruel events. Nothing wrong with wanting to escape reality.

“These curative herbs are extremely valuable to us right now. What if I got injured enough to be unable to use magic, what if Satou-san got her arm cut so bad she couldn’t draw her bow... Most of all, Minami, you who’s been fighting monsters at the front, you’re the one most likely to receive a wound”

Ryouko had been watching from behind and knows exactly how well Minami kept avoiding all sorts of attacks with her unparalleled athleticism, physical prowess, and ‘Abandon’. But it wasn’t good to be hubristic upon this evasion ability. Even if they weren’t against a powerful monster, it was easy to imagine her surrounded by more goma than she could cope with.

“Uh, but I’m... fine, see...”

“That’s not the point, Minami. If something happens to you, Satou-san and I who are ranged attackers will surely go down right after. Honestly, we should’ve decided how to use the herbs long ago.”

As if to escape the suffering, Ryouko averted her eyes from Minami, and of course, Meiko too, just staring at the grass. At the end of her gaze, a conveniently placed 4-leafed clover, was not there at all.

“So you see, we have to let Futaba-san go now. So that we can survive. Wasn’t it obvious, that useless pig was bound to be thrown away”

“Stop it Satou-san, you can’t say it like that”

“So what way *can* I say it your highness? Will you forgive me if I cry and apologise to Butaba... isn’t that like, a little bit hypocritical?”

“Whatever she did, you can’t call yourself a person if you say that!”

You can’t just give up on a human life just because it’s more efficient or if they’re useless.

“...No sorry. Like, I shouldn’t spit on the dead huh”

Ryouko’s face was sour enough to make her teeth grind. She had been stumped. Aya was right. No matter how many morals you held on too, having decided to let Meiko die, all of them would become utter hypocrisy. All three of them, would have to carry that weight.

“Hey, can’t we leave already? If you wanna watch over her till she dies, that’s a bit too much for me alright?”

It wasn’t fun for any of them. One could tell at a glance that Aya, and of course Ryouko and Minami too, all of them wanted to get away from this place of guilt.

“...You’re right. There weren’t any herbs here, so there could’ve been previous visitors”

“If some selfish trash gets to the transfer gate first, they’re pretty much not gonna wait around. If that 3 person limit thing is true, we’ll really be in at the deep end”

They could trust in Souma Yuuto's strength. Still, whether they could or couldn't make it to the goal first, was indeed a bit doubtful. The girls had seen many times along the way, places where the dungeon was caved in, passages that you couldn't take. With a bit of bad luck, they could need to go on long detours to arrive at the transfer gate. Worst case, they could also be completely blockaded from their destination.

If there was student luckier than Yuuto, yet utterly self-centered, they would undoubtedly rush to the exit with no regard to others.

"Also hey, there's exactly 3 of us now. Casting aside Butaba was just a matter of sooner or later huh?"

"...Just, stop Satou-san. You don't need to spell it out, I, got the full picture"

"If you do, then fine. I'd be happy if I didn't die 'cause of some hard feelings—but, you two seem alright. Since we made a decision everyone's ok with right?"

And then, Aya soberly stood up. After patting off the grass on her skirt, she walked towards Meiko at a casual pace. And from the bag lying beside her, she took out a squarish black case.

"Satou-san, that's—"

"Something she won't be needing anymore. And much better than using those goma knives"

The case being handed straight to Minami, was of course, Meiko's beloved knife set. Those sharp blades would be a godsend for a Thief. Perfect for carrying and storage, too good to pass up. Naturally, the meat cleaver equipped on Meiko would also be collected.

Minami was already borrowing a chef's knife, having a spare carried no loss. Moreover, Ryouko and Aya could both carry one for self-defence.

"E, I umm..."

"No worries, I'll give it over later"

Being considerate to Minami's feelings, who was tearing up, and hesitating to receive it, Aya forcefully shoved the knife set into her own bag. It was quite the size, but a schoolbag devoid of the deadweights known as textbooks and

reference books could manage the room.

“Guess we’re about done here”

And this time, Aya really did head on straight out of the fairy square. Ryouko and Minami, be as downcast as they may, followed after her.

“... W-wait... Help, me...”

Though feeble, that clinging voice definitely reached the ears of those two.

“...I’m sorry, Futaba-san”

“S-sorry... I’m so sorry...”

Leaving her with just that, the two left. Not once turning back.

Futaba Meiko was thus abandoned. A fitting end for the useless pig— was not a sentiment she herself would ever truly accept.

Her consciousness fading, what remained in Meiko’s heart was simply fear. Neither regret at her own actions, nor resentment towards the 3 who left her.

Just scared, frightened, and cold. She felt like she could just sink into that sea of cold but,

“Futaba-san! Futaba-san, are you alright!”

Descended the voice of her savior—

[1]So these names, they should mean similar to what the original says, but here’s my rough sources anyway: FF:TA and ADOM.

[2]superhero is said (ヒーロー) hiiro, while this latter one is (勇者) yuusha, which I said was warrior hero, but usually I just say hero.

[3]Butcher knife -> meat cleaver, got it wrong last time. A link.

[4]Like ‘fight, ON, fight, ON’ *etc.*

Chapter 13: Shaman and Pig

“Uh-huh...”

I couldn't do anything but make that random, buffoonish sound.

“... Yeah”

Futaba-san nods while shedding large drops of tears.

You're strong, enduring all that— are not the thoughtless words of praise I felt like giving her.

“Uh-huh, I see... haha, so even that class rep has the heart to throw people aside...”

I surprised myself with how low, how dark the emotions residing in that mumble were.

Yeah, I knew it wouldn't be a fun story. And certainly, I understand what those girls decided was somewhat reasonable. Limited recovery items, combat ability, threshold on survivors. Futaba Meiko who wasn't committing a thing. There couldn't be a better candidate to cast aside at that first juncture.

I was neither hot-blooded compatriot of justice, nor was I a charitable man of the cloth. So in a similar situation, I'd make the same decision. I could end up, unlike the class rep and Natsukawa-san who hesitated till the very end, spewing uglier, more egotistic than even Satou Aya. Those girls, did nothing wrong.

“Like hell they didn't...”

Yet, from deep inside my heart, rises a tremendous hatred. Come face to face with a victim of this abdication, an unrelenting contempt, a painful rage sweeps over me.

Because the Futaba-san in front of is that pitiable— is not the reason. It's because, she's just like me. Hopelessly incompetent, a useless good-for-nothing.

“If you weren't some shitty Shaman, but something like a Healer, I'd've already left this useless lard and made you a pal.”

Memories of humiliation resurface.

“Hey, aren’t you glad Saitou, your good pal got a shitty vocation. *Thanks to Kotarou-kun being a Shaman, I wasn’t discarded by Higuchi-samaa*, aren’t you thinking that while hittin’ away. Man, you really got a great friend there. Might be jealous.”

The filthy sensation of spit on my cheek is dredged up.

Yes, it’s because I’m powerless that I lost to Higuchi. It’s because Futaba-san is powerless that she wasn’t recognized as in ally. Both were the same, a natural result of our own inability.

But no way was I such an upright person, or some kind of defeatist so as to submissively accept that result.

No way in hell. I don’t know about others, but if it’s me, no way I wouldn’t rage, wouldn’t loathe, wouldn’t curse—

“Futaba-san, let’s team up”

I gave it to her straight, no roundabout, tempting narration, not a hint of trying to lead her into wanting it like some scam. I wasn’t in the mood for hogwash opening remarks, no, I basically just felt like saying it.

“...Eh?”

Blinking her round overflowing eyes, Futaba-san stares at me. Normally, I’d be lacking the handsome-points to meet a girl’s eyes, but with the influx of malevolent emotions right now, I could look straight back at those circular irides.

“Futaba-san, I don’t think you want to die yet?”

“Uh, yea...”

“And of course you aren’t thinking it’s so miserable being betrayed and want to commit suicide?”

“N-never!?”^[1]

That’s good, she still has the energy to instantly deny suicide. If she was chronically depressed or something, I’d have another boat-load of trouble

doing, cheerup and counselling.

If she has the will to live, I'd more than welcome her aboard. Well, not like I have the luxury to pick and choose my allies.

"Then, team up with me. This dungeon's quite too much for me to capture solo"

"A-uh, but... I... can't, do anything... So scared, I can't fight... I'll definitely be a pain for you, Momokawa-kun!"

"That's fine, I can't fight either. I'd even bet, my vocation is the weakest in the whole class"

It's really quite pathetic, but here I shall boldly proclaim. For I doth be the true weakest.

"... Momokawa-kun's, vocation?"

"It's Shaman. Forget offensives, I don't have any defence or evasion either. Top it off, not a thing for getaways either"

Yeah, you're damn right Higuchi, a Shaman can literally do fuck all, a real shit vocation, for now. I beat the Armor Bear, but that was basically me using up a lifetime's worth of luck.

"But, Momokawa-kun, you saved me!"

"The herbs were just that good. If you know the recipe, anyone can make it"

There's no such thing as being extra effective when hand-made by a Shaman. If it was a game, maybe you couldn't make concoctions without that vocation, or alternatively, you could have corrections that, with it, the effects would be many degrees higher but... Sorry, none of that here.

My Shaman powers basically amount to 'Intuition Pharmacy'. If the knowledge of effects and recipes got out, they'd stop being only mine.

On the other hand, a 'Healer' would use their skill itself for recovery effects, a power uniquely available through them. Worst case scenario, they'd get me to cough up all I knew about herbs, and just off me.

Ah, then I guess, it's actually better I not tell anyone the types of herbs, and

how to make meds from them. Even if I'm teaming up with Futaba-san. The confidentiality of herb knowledge, is pretty much one of the only factors of my worth.

Wow, I'm pretty much trash for thinking these things literally in the middle of inviting her. Well, self-reproach aside. Right now, I need to concentrate fully on capturing Futaba-san.

"I really am the weakest, and in this dungeon, the most useless out of anyone. 'Cause of that, I almost got killed once"

"Really!? So you mean... Momokawa-kun, you also... umm..."

Receiving Futaba-san's gentle, considerate, and wholesomely sympathetic gaze, I silently nod.

I mean, me wanting to join Higuchi's merry bunch, is a 11 out of 10, fuck no. You can bow down dogeza and beg me to join your party all you want. I'll bash y'with a Red Shroom, motherfucker.

"I don't think there's anyone who'll be needing me anytime soon. What about you, Futaba-san, if we catch up to class rep's bunch, you think they'll want to take you back?"

"T-that's... I don't..."

Well duh. How barefaced do you have to be to just act like nothing happened and run back to the party that fired you. Matter of fact, if you did, they'd make you leave by force this time. That slightly crazy Satou Aya might even come at you with 'Aim'.

But the point here is not only with the class rep party, but in making Futaba-san imagine the scenario at every encounter with other classmates too. She should've noticed. If that class rep, if even Kisaragi Ryouko abandoned her, no one in their right mind would take in her incompetent self.

Well, someone like Souma-kun might've made a more appropriate reply; *hey, if you'd been left to die, and your heart was practically on the verge of shattering, anyone would take you in*, or something, not really, I wouldn't know.

"The chances of us getting protected by people with strong vocations are next

to nil. The class rep might've refuted it, but I'd bet there's more people who take that info about the 3-person limit with more than a grain of salt. Even if they aren't fully convinced, they'd be acting under that premise being true. So, they won't have any room for useless dependees"

"No... but... you're right..."

It's tough pill to swallow, but seems Futaba-san is sensible enough to accept that harsh reality. Could even be that she's only buttering up to me, pretending to listen to my boring explanation-cum-lipservice.

Well, I don't care either way. No one wants to group themselves with a Shaman, is an absolute truth I can say with unbending confidence. I've spoken not a single falsehood.

"So, weaklings as we are, we should try to work with that presupposition. I'm not too crazy about letting myself die. Futaba-san, didn't you say you felt the same?"

"Yeah, that's right... definitely not, I thought, I was really gonna die that time... so, so scary..."

I don't like thinking one person can truly understand another, but this one's *the* exception.

The time I encountered the Armor Bear, the moment I beat it. The span I peeked at the Goma eating the girl. Death, was at the epicenter of all of those incidents; and every time, it formed in me a tremendous ripple of fear and repulsion. I never want to do that again. I never want that to be me. No matter what, no amount of pain or suffering would make me pass the uncrossable line of desiring death.

"Yeah, so to not die, we'll do anything. So we can survive, we should use any means we can. So please, Futaba-san. Join me, and let's challenge this dungeon together."

"R-really... you're really ok with me?"

"I wouldn't take anyone *but* Futaba-san"

"I, can't do a thing, I really am useless... you know?"

“Others are just overpowered. Every one of them started off so strong it’s unfair... but us, we’ll keep at it, and definitely become stronger”

“But, but I...”

“I won’t betray you. Futaba-san, I’d never abandon you. I’m not asking you to believe me right now. Trust, is something you build together after all”

Was that a bit too pretentious? Certainly, I don’t believe I made any blatant lies. I truly believe that I, and only I, won’t abandon the good-for-nothing Futaba-san. Casting her away because she’s useless wouldn’t make me any different from them.

Nevertheless, that the possibility of me leaving her to run away by myself is one I can’t let go of, is again, true. No, depending on the situation, it’s pretty much a yes.

That’s why, in truth, there’s no conviction or meaning behind my words. People like Souma-kun or Tendou-kun could surely make these gutsy words their reality... but for a normal person like me they were baseless.

“U, uu... Momokawa-kun! Thankyou, thankyouuu!”

Yet, even that worthless gab had enough of an impact on Futaba-san to make her shout words of gratitude.

Too easy, or rather, hooked her right at the weak spot, I should say. Her face, layered in tears yet alit, sharply pricked at my heart.

“I’ll work hard! For Momokawa-kun, I’ll give it my everything!”

“A-appreciate it... So then, regardsyoroshiku Futaba-san”

“My vewy bess regaads too!”^[2]

Whatever way it may be, I succeeded in my plan of dragging Futaba-san into my party.

^[1]I’d like to make a slightly belated note on ‘!?’ . The point: this is simply exclamation(!), not in any way a question(?). To my knowledge, in old delinquent manga, they used the ‘!?’ to show surprise, astonishment, like, just slap it up there, —!? Anyway, I’ve been trying to be consistent with the author’s

use of punctuation, and that's what he uses. Again. It's not a question.

[2]not typo, sobby words.

Chapter 14: Hero and Saint

“Vocation ‘Saint’ huh... Is that even a job?”

“Geez, don’t say that, it’s too embarrassing!”

Cheeks fuming in red, it’s the same old Sakura. I guess even receiving a ‘Vocation’, a supernatural power from the gods of this world, won’t change people all that much.

“And nii-san too, what indeed is up with that ‘Hero’ vocation of yours?”

“Hahaha, having is said to my face is pretty embarrassing too”

I had become a ‘Hero’ before I knew it. Don’t remember using that magic circle, but when my consciousness got floaty after getting a beatdown by the Armor Bear, I clearly remember hearing the voice of a Goddess.^[1]

“Mayst thou bring light to this world and become — the ‘Hero’.”

Is what the Goddess had said. I must’ve become a ‘Hero’ right at that moment.

“*Sigh*, forget saving the world, I wanna know if I can save ourselves”

“I for one would like a one-way ticket to Earth the moment we escape”

“Goes without saying, but why the harsh tone?”

“C’mon nii-san, you know you’re the type to dive straight into danger, saying things like the people of this world are in danger from monsters or something”

“I mean, if it’s in my power, I probably would”

“But, what happens when you keep fighting on and on? You could even get thrown into a war... that and bashing heads with punks back in Japan are on a completely different dimension”

I do realize. In this world the word ‘fight’ definitely implies one where both parties bet their lives. I can easily imagine what’s lying ahead if I kept fighting these harsh battles.

“Don’t worry. I’ll definitely get you, and everyone else out of this dungeon;

we'll get back to our world. I have my priorities straight”

“Alright, nii-san. But don’t try doing everything by yourself now. Thanks to this vocation, even I can fight”

“Yeah, you’re right, depending on you, Sakura”

I am already witness to Sakura’s powers as a ‘Saint’.

Now that we’re at a safe zone known as a ‘Fairy Square’, I think back on what Sakura means by her ability to fight. I have a deep impression that every one of her Skills are powerful.

There are 3 skills that come with a vocation

<i>Holy Enchant</i> Keeper of the Light	Grants the power of Light to any thing. Its brilliance disperses malevolence, and expels evil
<i>Lux Sagitta</i> Light Arrow	Shoots an arrow of Light; a low grade attack of the light attribute
<i>Healing Light</i> Glow of Remedy	A restoration magic that combines both Heal and Cure ^[2]

Those are the powers brandished by Sakura. Since we only perceive those brief descriptions, there’s no choice but to test them out to observe their effect.

And as for what Sakura demonstrated those powers against, it was those bone monsters that pop up in games: the Skeleton.

The first surprise was the output of ‘Lux Sagitta’. When Sakura pulls her archery club bow, an arrow of brilliant white light appears nocked there. And when she releases it, leaving a pristine streaks of light in the air, the arrow flies towards the Skeleton as if being sucked in.

Upon connection, the dazzling light bursts, leaving behind only the remains of crushed, dismantled bone.

It’s not like the bones of Skeleton are brittle. Having fought them myself, I can confirm their robustness. There are atleast as tough as those of human origin. They wouldn’t crack under trivial force.

Making those bones explode into bits says a lot about that output. I don’t really want to imagine getting hit by that dead on.

Next on the list is ‘Holy Enchant’. When Sakura let her hand hold my

bokutou wooden sword, it flushed with a faint white glimmer; a few seconds later, and the enchantment was set. The bokutou consequently held a holy radiance.

Bashing a Skeleton with it during this shining state causes it's bony corpus to quickly crumble like sand.

Seems like Skeletons, as Undead, were super susceptible to the light attribute like in games, but I wonder if these kinds of weaknesses and corrections are being adjusted for in this world. Even without the advantage against Undead, I quickly understood after a few swings that this bokutou under 'Holy Enchant' was much sturdier than usual. It wouldn't give even if I banged it against a wall hard enough to definitely break in normal conditions.

There's a time limit on the effects, but it's not an issue if only used when required. As a result, I could suffice with my single bokutou. No need to help myself to the clubs carried by the Skeletons.

Finally, on 'Healing Light', since we haven't had any noticeable injuries, it hasn't been put to the test. The grievous injuries from the Armor Bear's assault were completely healed when I'd awoken as a Hero, and I've been without a scratch since.

Still, looking at these awe-inspiring feats of magic, we could expect the healing magic to be great too. And since we're traversing a dangerous dungeon that's crawling with monsters, this kind of recovery option is all the more indispensable. In a way, this healing magic can be considered much more valuable than attack power.

I'd hope we could break free from here not needing to use it, but considering that there's not only the small fry Skeletons, but powerful foes like the Armor Bear, I know it won't be that easy.

"...Sigh, this Fairy Walnut, it isn't bad per say, but it's kind of dispiriting that we'll have only these to go on from now"

"Don't be so picky. I think we're blessed enough to find a stable source of nutrition in this kind of survival scenario"

"Maybe for you, nii-san, you'd be used to this from your extended trips to the

mountain with jii-samagrand father.”

No, well even jii-san wouldn't take me training to this kind of monster infested dungeon. Well, that jii-san might gladly dive into dungeon capturing, but I don't see myself as that battle-hungry to begin with. I just wanna get back to regular old, peaceful highschooler life.

Leaving aside those thoughts, I finish up my walnuts, and stand up.

“Now then, I guess... we should check on *that*”

“Uu, nii-san, you're really going to check *that*?”

Sakura openly makes a wry face, but we really can't ignore this previous guest lodging in this Fairy Square.

“I mean look, it's a dead Knight. And the sword's still hanging at the waist... Isn't this the best chance to get a weapon?”

This was a genuine skeletal corpse wearing slightly dirty armor. Like if they'd been attacked by monsters while exploring, and made it all the way here, but the wound was too deep and *etc.*^[3]

I'd prefer not to be like that in the future. *May they rest in peace* *Namu-amida-butsu*, I leave a prayer for their passing.

“It won't become a Skeleton and attack right?”

“Right now, I feel like I can deal with that unarmed”

It's not as much as when I beat the Armor Bear with the light sword, but my body feels exceedingly light and overflowing with power. In fact, I've confirmed that my physical prowess has distinctly risen from the level I was at yesterday. Only, I didn't need to go full power against Skeletons, so I can't really tell exactly how strong I am.

“See, nothing to worry about”

That it's showing no reaction as I rudely pick through its equipment shows, without a doubt, that the corpse is staying a corpse. I assure Sakura that it's not an Undead monster, but it's not right to expect a girl to happily engage in rummaging through a dead body. Reminds me, Sakura's a pretty easy scare. She's weak to horror films after all.

For now, ransacking duty's on me. First job would be taking the most eye-catching longsword off from the belt along with the scabbard. I unsheathe and examine the blade.

"This isn't, bad at all... a fine sword. No rust, and the make isn't shabby either"

"It does indeed look new. I wonder, if it's an effect from magic?"

Not implausible. The armor has a light-weight make, favoring maneuverability, but there are elaborate designs here and there; doesn't seem like it's for the common soldier. This sword too, has a coat of arms resembling a red lion, and doesn't seem like it was mass produced. Perhaps this person was a noble.

In that case, it wouldn't be strange if there was magic cast on this sword to maintain its edge. Though it's not like we have any way to confirm that.

"—Yup, this actually looks appropriate for battle"

"And much more reliable than a bokutou"

With a swing, I again affirm the splendidness of the sword. Would've been the best if it was a katana, but I really can't be that fussy about it in another world. I should consider it lucky their norm wasn't some weird shaped sword like a Shotel.^[4]

"Sorry Knight-san, but I'll be gratefully using this"

Mostly, done with the scavenging, I once again place a hand on the skeleton of the Knight and say a prayer; following which, I equip the longsword to my waist.

The weapons I appropriated from the Knight are: this longsword, and a dagger they also possessed. The dagger was also well preserved, not a bit of rusting. Of course, it also had the same red lion coat of arms on it.

"Sakura, you hold on to the dagger, for self-defence"

"No, I'm... won't it be more useful if nii-san takes it?"

"'Lux Sagitta' is pretty dangerous at close range. Also, haven't you taken lessons in handling a knife atleast?"

“Well, a bit, yes...”

Though not as hard as with me, Sakura has been more or less put through the ropes by jii-san since childhood. Not only self-defence techniques to deal with hoodlums carrying knives, but even the ways of taking those knives and stabbing back has been drilled into her. That jii-san said Sakura's a girl, and it's much easier to justify it as self-defence, so she should stab them to death without worry, really makes him a shitty old fart. Though, Sakura seriously asking him to teach her how to stab till they're on the verge of death, is pretty something too.

“Well, let's head out then. Sooner we find our classmates, the better”

And with our equipment ready, we left the Fairy Square.

What appeared in the area right after were the pitch black, short, humanoid monsters called 'Goma'. Carrying rusted knives or axes, clubs as if stolen they'd stolen them from Skeletons, or spears made of animal bone, these were crude yet indeed armed, dangerous monsters. Even scarier was the fact that these things had a craving for human meat. On the off chance they beat us, they'd probably literally eat us alive.

The appearance is reminiscent of the representative mob monster in RPGs: the Goblin, but that's no excuse to let our guard down.

“...Nii-san, wasn't that, just a bit too much?”

“No wait, I can explain, Sakura, please hear me out”

Right now, spread around me was a scene so bloody and gruesome, you'd want to ask if some crazed mass murderer passed by.

When we exited the passage that we left the Fairy Square from, we came upon a slightly large path where 5 Goma attacked. Of course, we easily got the upper hand and beat them but... the killing was so brutal, even I'm a bit taken aback. The corpses were scattered and shred so bad, it's hard to tell if there were 5 of them. At some point, priority went from how I'd attack to where I'd put my feet to avoid the blood spatter.

“Please, explain away”

“I was just trying out some Skills”

The disaster before me was nothing but the result of me testing the effects of my Skills. If I hadn’t done that, I’d have properly finished them with clean and efficient strikes of the Knights longsword.

“I see, that’s why nii-san’s movements started changing from normal. So, after using them, your impressions?”

“It’s got ridiculous power. Though it seems they’re called Martial Arts when release by a sword”

The Skills I learned after defeating the Armor Bear were in total 6.

Learned Skills	
<i>Thrust</i>	Boosts piercing potential. A sharp blow impales the enemy
<i>Slash</i>	Boosts tearing potential. A sharp blow cuts the enemy
<i>High Walk</i>	Boosts speed. Run like the wind

Acquired Skills	
<i>Force Boost</i>	Boosts strength. Force akin to the Armor Bear
<i>Iron Guardiron hide</i>	Boosts defence. Guard akin to the Armor Bear
<i>Tri Slash</i>	3 strike combo attack. Mutilate the enemy akin to the Armor Bear’s claws ^[5]

Learned Skills are ones that apply to my own growth. In gaming terms, they’re skills that I automatically learn as I level up.

Acquired Skills would be ones that originate from defeated enemies. This probably doesn’t take the other party’s Skill as is, but takes that as a base and converts it into a form that a human like me can use. They had gone through the necessary corrections.

The Armor Bear’s strength is a result of its own muscles, and its tough defence comes from that thick metallic shell. Of course, being able to maim the opponent with a swing of its arm is only thanks to the numerous sharp claws on its paws. If I was literally going to have the same powers as my foe, I’d have the same appearance as the Armor Bear by now.

“The power’s ridiculous, but there some buildup time needed, and right after launching, there’s a slight gap in my defence. They also drain more stamina than when normally swinging the sword, so I gotta consider the time and place.”

“They’re quite similar to magic. But these powers we get from the ‘Vocation’, we become more adept the more we use them, it seems, so I guess you can’t be too sparing?”

“Yeah, if I can’t get used to using these Martial Arts, they won’t be useful when it actually counts. So for now, I’ll be practicing”

But I’ll refrain from bursting apart Goma with ‘Tri Slash’.

“Nii-san, you kind of look like you’re having fun”

“It may sound careless but... I wanted to get stronger. And now, we’ve come to another world, and I was given this great power you can even visually confirm. My excitement being high, is probably because of my lack of mental training”

“Sorry, I wasn’t saying that cynically. I really do know how deeply nii-san feels about wanting strength. But what if this great ‘power’ changes you, is something I’m a bit, uneasy about...”

Damn, Sakura really had me there. Seems I got high tensioned enough to arouse this kind of worry. Really need to get a hold of myself. Maybe some Zen meditation later?

“I’m perfectly fine. Me getting as strong as I can is only because I want to protect you, Sakura, and everyone else too. I don’t know why God made me a ‘Hero’ or how much stronger I can become but... I wouldn’t stray from using that strength correctly, ever.”

There’s no use just having power. How you use it is the vital part. This doctrine has been pummelled into me by jii-san since I was a kid. You could say, it’s carved onto my bones by now.

I understand that. I meant to be aware of it since forever now. But now that I have the power to easily kill a human shaped thing, I feel like I gained a whole new apprehension of that teaching.

Or maybe I'll know it even better from now on; it would become something that keeps me in check.

"Just being protected, it's really vexing you know. So, I will get stronger with you. I'll try and get even a little stronger, so I can support you, nii-san"

"You will... Yeah, of course you will. Thanks, Sakura. Counting on you"

"Anytime, nii-san"

This excellent sister of mine thinking dearly of her brother, really does warm my heart... but huh, this heartwarming feeling doesn't match scenery of me in the middle of a slaughterfest at all. Atmosphere is pretty important.

Anyway, after a breather, we continued on the passage with no end in sight.

On the way, we got into a large domed space filled with vegetation like a botanical garden, where we encountered more Goma and packs of wild, reddish dogs. They were in packs, but there was no special powers or magic as a result of them being grouped, so with Sakura's support fire, and 'High Walk's' maneuverability, we easily eliminated them.

Up till now, the monsters were small fry. But there's no telling when a big shot with the Armor Bear would appear, so we made sure to be on maximum alert while advancing through the dungeon.

It was when we'd been in this place long enough to notice that the safe, relief stations known as Fairy Squares, were scattered at quite reasonable intervals. It was when we arrived at another one of those Fairy Squares.

"...No way, Souma-kun?"

There, we found the previous guests.

"Ah, i-it's true... Souma-kun, and Sakura-chan... I'm not in a dream, right?"

Familiar faces, there were 2 girls.

"Class rep and Natsukawa-san! What a relief, you're both alright—"

"U, uu...uwaaaaa! Souma-kuun!"

"Wha! H-hold on, Natsukawa-san!?"

Suddenly hugging me in tears, I can't do anything but get flustered. I'm just

normal friends with Natsukawa-san, nothing on the level of embracing each upon reuniting. And now'd be when Sakura misunderstands and looks at me coldly... is what I thought, but Sakura was facing class rep with a weighty expression.

“Ryouko, I hoped to say I'm glad you're alright... but that, doesn't really seem to be the case”

“Yeah, Sakura, and Yuuto-kun, we're really saved now that you're here. Thanks”

Apparently their situation was worse than I thought. Natsukawa-san too, it doesn't seem like she's crying from simple anxiety. I could see her having been mentally cornered at a severe level.

For now, I return the sobbing Natsukawa-san's embrace to calm her down. And asking what happened, would be towards class rep who has an awfully tired and pale face, yet was still holding together.

“Class rep, what exactly, happened to you guys”

“... A friend, another one died. Just a while ago”

It was an event I hadn't imagined... No, that's wrong, I purposefully didn't think about it. The powerful 'Vocation', the weak monsters that could only crowd together. So everyone else was fine too.

Naively, I made myself think like that.

That that kind of thinking was not hope, but merely a convenient desire, is proven fact, right here, right now.

Thus, I was finally made aware that among my classmates, there was a casualty.

[1]I've decided to use –G-od(dess) for respectful addressing, like kami-sama, and –g-od(s), when they're referring to the many gods or just mentioning a god in passing. No deep meaning here, just thought it could use a distinction.

[2]I try to make a note when names are involved. Thankfully, all names in this case have their dictionfurigana given. So no changes there. Source for 'Keeper of the Light'. Cure and Heal are also in furi, but they're really very obvious. Also,

stuff like 'Lux Sagitta' appear in Kuro no Maou too! I bet the reader's familiar with it, but I'll take any excuse to squeeze that in~

[3]I'll use *they* for gender neutrality.

[5]I made a table. Well, I'll get to doing this for the other skill listings soon™. Also, I don't know why I said Full Boost before. typo = fixed. All skills are as per dictionfurigana. The descriptions are pretty straightforward too, so nothing to say on that. The meanings are pretty similar to the dictions, except 'Iron Guard'. I'm debating changing 'Acquired' to 'Integrated' or 'Assimilated'. All of these seem ok, doushio~

Author's Q&A: Act.2

Now then, since the 2nd act has ended, I'd like to make some commentary.

More than half of this act was about the thrown away pig AKA Futaba-chan that Kotarou took pity on; but well, that wasn't something deviating from the direction of this work. Kotarou had been hit with the hat trick of the Armor Bear-san in the forest, the DQN Higuchi, and the traitor Masaru, and his body and soul were tattered, but the other classmates are having their share of trouble too, is what ended up being presented.

As this is a battle royale setting with even a class roster set up, I wanted to make sure to show that people other than the protagonist were also coming along in the dungeon and having things happen to them. Struggling through the dungeon, and then meeting a classmate, but will they be a friend or an enemy... these kinds of interpersonal relationships make up a big theme of the story.

Personally, the highlight of the 2nd act would be the scene where the class rep and Satou (female) are bickering over whether or not they would abandon Futaba-chan. Disregarding pleasantries and yielding to ruthless logic. That is what I wanted the climax to be.

Satou (female), who seemed to have the only role of hysterically asserting that they should *just throw away that useless pig*, was not exactly in the wrong. The class rep giving in to her opinions only proved the fact. That *they should have decided the allocation long before* implicitly means that there was never going to be any herbs reserved for Futaba in the first place.

In that situation, class rep doing her best to be upstanding may be commendable as a person, but in a survival scenario, it only produces more conflict, and is kind of a pain for everyone. Still, being so heartfully stubborn is human, and Satou (female) easily saying heartless things is also human.

Being said outright, it sounds like a cliché, but still, I believe that is what makes it more fun as a story.

Now, the class rep has already had the vicious experience of abandoning a

classmate, but for the Hero AKA Souma Yuuto, how far would his own justice prevail? I only hope the reader can enjoy Kotarou's dungeon capturing antics, along with the turbulent interpersonal relationships between the classmates.

With that, we arrive at the Q&A corner

Q. Hell's a DQN?

A. In this work, or rather, in Kotarou's point of view, a DQN would be a character with bad behaviour, someone whose speech and conduct exhibit strong egotism, or someone whose appearance would suggest such mannerisms. Even if they are actually really nice on the inside, if they look punk-ish, he'd go "Yup, that's a DQN". I mean, he can't know what's inside.

Now, this question had strangely become the subject of great controversy in the comments section of the last activity report. It's originally internet slang so I understand there's no helping it if people don't agree on a strict definition, but I guess we can only take it as how we personally see it.

Q. Shiramine Academy is a college prep school, so how come there's delinquents?

A. It's a prep school that has delinquents. Both Higuchi and Tendou have legitimately passed the entrance exam, have been getting passing grades on their tests, don't have poor attendance, and managed to get into 2nd year 11th grade.

I'm not going for realism. It's simply a story that has them going to a college prep school, while at the same time, having a taste in delinquent fashion.

Tendou getting into so many fights but not getting expelled is... well, maybe he's just good at getting out of trouble? (lol)

Q. So the girl Kotarou saw getting eaten by Goma is...

A. It's Satou Aya.

Kotarou won't go thinking that that corpse was actually Satou Aya anytime soon, but in the end it'd be found out by process of elimination anyway; so I'm making it clear.

Q. Isn't the Hero a cheat?

A. I don't think so? This much power is pretty much guaranteed for a protagonist, in fact, isn't it unlucky for him he didn't get the strongest cheat as an other-world summoning bonus? Souma Yuuto-kun gets stronger with effort and tough battles, he doesn't rely on cheats and is a commendable Hero!

※ The protagonist of this story is Momokawa Kotarou^[1]

Q. Is it a contrast?

A. It is indeed a contrast.

I'm sure all the readers have long realized, but the activities of Kotarou and Souma Yuuto do in fact demonstrate a literary contrast. The first monster encounter is the Armor Bear for both. Kotarou somehow overcoming with wisdom, bravery and Red Shrooms vs. Souma Yuuto somehow suddenly using Hero powers to instakill.

Next, in the 2nd act, Kotarou made the useless, thrown-away pig Futaba his ally, and on the other side, even though he was already invincible against all the small fry he encountered, Souma Yuuto reconvened with the top-tier fighters, class rep and Natsukawa.

It's become a point where the power gap between the Kotarou and Souma Yuuto parties has magnified but... As outlined, Kotarou chasing after potential allies blessed with strength is also a theme of the story.

I would appreciate it if the reader cheers on Kotarou in hopes that, someday, he would catch up to Souma Yuuto.

Q. About the party compositions

A. It's random according to their starting location upon summoning. They wouldn't know who's nearby, but their destination would be the same, so naturally there are clashes. Having met with his sister early on would be Souma Yuuto's good luck, and the same goes for Futaba who met class rep before any monsters. Even Kotarou landed near, the though dead, Takashima-kun, and if he was alive, maybe they could've teamed up, it would be slightly easier on him.

Q. There's a lot of Fairy Squares

A. There are. There are the, so to speak, save-points. Though, it doesn't say if they can revive there.

They exist in multitudes in the vast dungeon, and are moderately placed to ease the process of advancing deeper. Basically, the standard dungeon capture tactic would be to depart from one Fairy Square aiming for the next one.

Q. Isn't *pig* a bit mean?

A. It's not. A heroine who can't fight is just a sow.

Q. Will the heroine go yandere?

A. A foolish question to me of all people. Of course she will. The heroine in this case would be the one connected to the protagonist, precluding female characters who act as heroines for other characters. Protagonist → Momokawa Kotarou will definitely have heroine(s) who will go yandere for him. Should Futaba-chan have the role of such a heroine, is something to be revealed in the coming chapters.^[2]

And that concludes that. If there's anything picking your interest, please feel free to leave a comment. I will (maybe) answer in the activity reports!

^[1]I thought this was a bit confusing, so I'll elaborate. Author says that a normal isekai MC would be much more OP (cliche), so Yuuto is relatively not much of a cheat character. As always, Kotarou is the actual MC, not Yuuto.

^[2] I made it heroine(s) cause the jap is vague about plurality here. It's not a spoiler. I have no idea if a harem will happen ლ(•ω•;)ლ

www.lionmask.pro/p/shaman-arc2-qa.html